

S E R M O N S

O N T H E

Following Subjects:

Elijah's prayer, That it might
not rain, considered.

Wherein charity excels faith
and hope.

The condemnation of unbe-
lievers just.

Elijah's calling down fire from
heaven vindicated.

The reasons why Christians
should always rejoice.

A defence of Elisha's curse.

Faith a reasonable condition
of salvation.

The unbelief of the citizens
of Nazareth unreasonable.

Of GOD's not giving men
hearts to perceive.

Holiness the design of the
Gospel.

Real holiness more excellent
and necessary than positive
rites.

Of sins of omission with re-
spect to moral duties.

Mutual love the distinguish-
ing mark of true Christians.

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By JOSEPH MORRIS.

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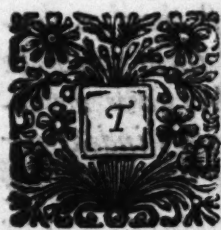
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MDCCXLIII.





P R E F A C E.



THE great number of Sermons already printed in this kingdom upon useful and important subjects, written by men very eminent for learning and other abilities, may seem to render the publication of others unnecessary. But let it be considered, that as sermons are better suited than larger treatises to the circumstances and capacities of most readers; so it may be of great advantage to have the same subjects treated in a different manner, and set in all the various lights they are capable of. Besides, the frequent attacks, which of late years have been made upon divine revelation by the enemies of the christian religion, may be a sufficient apology for publishing other discourses, in which difficult texts of Scripture are explained, and the authority of the Bible is vindicated against their cavils. And it is hoped, that some of the

following Discourses will be found to be such; particularly those, wherein the character of two eminent prophets, and the authority of the Scriptures, so far as concerns their history, are defended. These were occasioned by the conversation I had many years ago with some Gentlemen, who were inclined to Deism, and took a pleasure in caviling at several passages of the Bible. It was not difficult to discern, that they had never thoroughly considered the grounds of revealed religion, and did not understand the languages, in which the holy Scriptures are penned; but yet they spoke against them as dogmatically, as if they had studied them with the greatest care and attention. This gave me occasion to observe, that as unbelievers endeavour to undermine divine revelation by attacking some particular passages of Scripture, and by this artifice draw unwary persons into their unhappy way of thinking; so it would be no small service to religion, no improbable means of stemming the torrent of infidelity, were those passages set in a true light. I have made some attempt towards this in the abovementioned discourses, which would have been carried much farther, had I not been deprived by several adverse turns in life of some advantages, which seemed necessary for executing such a design.

Whether any writer has explained these passages in every respect, as I have done, I know not; but it will be proper to observe, that the sermon on Elijah's calling down fire from

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from heaven was preached in the year 1724, and the defence of Elisha's curse some time after; yet several years before the book intituled Christianity as old as the creation came out. The sermon on Elijah's prayer, that it might not rain, which is here placed before both of them, because the history is prior in order of time, was preached just after the publication of that Book, when I had read it, but had it not at hand. For these reasons I could not state the objections against these passages in the words of the author. But I am not sensible, that they have lost any of their force by being expressed in my words, or would have gained any strength, if they had been laid down in his.

He says of Elisha's curse,^a "Who is not surprised to find the holy prophet Elisha cursing, in the name of the Lord, little children, for calling him bald pate? And what is still more surprising, Two she bears, upon his cursing, strait devoured forty two little children."

Of Elijah's calling down fire from heaven, and praying that it might not rain, he speaks thus, ^b "Elijah's causing fire to come down from heaven, to destroy two captains, with their companies, for no other fault, but bluntly delivering a message from the King, and perhaps, in the very words they were commanded; was not so cruel, as his hindring it from raining upon the earth for the

A 3

" space

^a P. 265.

^b Ibid.

“ space of three years and six months; since
 “ a drought of that continuance, without dew
 “ or rain, in such a barren country as Ju-
 “ dea, must have, without miracles, destroy’d
 “ every thing; and yet St. James^a from hence
 “ takes occasion to recommend the efficacy of
 “ prayer.”

Two things are here plainly supposed. First, that the prophets brought down these severe judgments for slight reasons; as because the children called Elisba bald pate, and the captains bluntly delivered a message from their King to Elijah. And secondly, with respect to the latter, that he acted from a cruel spirit; for his causing fire to come down from heaven to destroy the two captains and their fifties was not so cruel, he says, as his hindring it from raining for the space of three years and six months. But how are these things proved? Are they supported by any just remarks on the original words? Is it from thence made appear, that those pious men, who are represented in the sacred history as prophets, in these cases acted from their own cruel spirit; that they did not prophetically denounce, what they knew God would send for wise ends of his government, but caused him by their prayers and imprecations to send down those heavy judgments for the slight reasons here suggested? Nothing of this kind is attempted; but certainly it is a just reproach to a learned Civilian to bring such severe charges against persons of their

^a James v. 17.

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their character without any evidence. He could not but know, that an accusation ought not to be brought against the dead, any more than against the living, without sufficient proof. But it is the method of this writer to assert things without any shew of proof, and to raise objections against passages of scripture, without making that appear to be the true sense, which he puts upon them: as might be largely shewn.

If an unbeliever will say any thing to the purpose against the conduct of the prophets, or the history itself; he must prove, that they are not here introduced as predicting, and denouncing what they knew, by the spirit of prophecy, God would inflict for wise and just ends of his government, as I have attempted to shew; but as acting from their own cruel and vindictive temper. And in order to make this appear, he must furnish us with a new key to the language of Scripture. He must shew, that when it is said, The word of the Lord came unto Elijah, the meaning is, he acted from his own cruel spirit; that tho' it is said Elisha cursed these children in the name of the Lord, he was moved by his own passion, without any warrant from God. But if this cannot be done, as I am certain it cannot; if it must be acknowledged, as I have indeavoured to shew, that they only denounced what they knew God would send: he must then prove, that it was not consistent with the goodness, justice and wisdom of God to punish the Jews for their abominable idolatry, and those aggravated crimes,

which attended it; or if he must give up this point also, as I am persuaded he must, it will lie upon him to prove, that it was an argument of a cruel spirit in the prophets to foretel and denounce, what God had justly determined to send. And I would then ask, why no unbeliever has attempted to charge those prophets with cruelty, who foretold the captivity and other judgments, which were inflicted upon that nation for the like crimes. The reason, I conceive, is plainly this; because it is certain from the distance of the event, that they acted as prophets; and I hope I have sufficiently proved, that our prophets acted in the same character, in the cases before us, tho the event immediately followed.

The remarks on the Hebrew words translated children in the history of Elisha's curse were not only occasioned by a due attention to the history itself, but also by the observations I had made many years before upon the like words in other languages. I had the pleasure to observe, when the learned bishop Patrick's Commentaries were reprinted in the year 1727, that he had made the same remark; but the examples here brought were not taken from him, nor were the like examples in any of the other discourses borrowed from others, but are such as I had observed and collected myself. And many more might be produced, if necessary.

In those sermons, in which I have indeavoured to shew, that the condemnation of unbelievers is just, and that faith is a reasonable condition

condition of salvation, my design was not only to vindicate the christian institution, which denounces future condemnation against unbelievers, and makes faith an indispensable condition of salvation; but also to shew believers, what their faith must be in order to their obtaining salvation by Jesus Christ. After this declaration, I think no judicious reader can misconstrue what is said of some wrong definitions of faith. We ought to expect salvation from Christ, to depend on him for the salvation promised to us in the Gospel; but if any man thinks he savingly believes, because he looks to Christ alone for salvation, he may deceive himself. To look to Christ as the only saviour will avail him nothing, if his faith does not make his temper and practice conformable to his precepts laid down in the Gospel. It is therefore requisite to take into the definition of faith those effects, which shew it to be genuine and sincere.

In discoursing upon Deut. xxix. 4. I have given three interpretations of the words, leaving every one to choose that which he most approves. I confess, every passage of scripture has, in my opinion, one determinate sense; and when this can be fixed by attending to the true signification of the original words, the scope of the writer, or parallel places of Scripture, no other ought to be given. The way of interpreting places of Scripture according to the sound of the words, and accommodating them to express our own sentiments, has too long prevailed, and been the cause of explaining many Scriptures in

a wrong sense. But however, where the original words will admit of different interpretations, and each of them is not only so agreeable to other places, but likewise to the design of the writer, that it is not easy to decide which was intended, there each of them may be proposed. In this passage therefore I have observed, that the words may be read interrogatively, which gives a sense perfectly consistent with the divine attributes, the tenor of the Bible, and the end of the speaker. And they, who are conversant in philological studies, know very well, that the true sense of many passages, both in sacred and profane writers, has been happily restored by adjusting the points. Who does not perceive the difficulty of reconciling the words of Christ in Matt. xxvi. 45. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest, with the following verse, Rise, let us be going: behold he is at hand that doth betray me? But if these words are read interrogatively, Sleep ye on still? as they may be read from the original, they will exactly agree with the following words, and contain such a gentle reproof, as he gives them, Luke xxii. 46. And he said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray.

The second interpretation of this text occurred to my thoughts in explaining the words of Christ, Matt. xxv. 29. on another occasion; but being diffident of my own judgment, I consulted some authors, and found this interpretation was preferred by one, whom I cannot now recollect.

But

But my design in discoursing upon this text was not only to fix what appeared to me the genuine sense of the words, but chiefly to point out the good uses, which may be made of it, when rightly understood.

The discourses, in which it is shewn, that moral duties are more excellent and necessary than positive rites, were preached many years before the controversy about the foundation of moral virtue, or the dispute concerning the moral and positive duties of the christian religion arose; and when I had nothing in view, but to ingage my hearers not to lay too much stress on the observation of positive ordinances, but to have the greatest regard to moral virtue, as that wherein religion principally consists. And as I am intirely persuaded, that the christian sacraments were instituted for wise and good ends, and are every way fitted to answer those ends; so I should be very much concerned, if what I have hinted in the beginning and close of the former of these discourses be not sufficient to prevent any thing I have said from being strained to countenance a disregard to the positive institutions of the Gospel, on account of that preference, which is due to real holiness.

But I will detain the reader no longer from the discourses themselves, than while I add, that if these are not altogether disagreeable to the public, I may be encouraged to print some others on different subjects, several of which I have been long solicited to publish.



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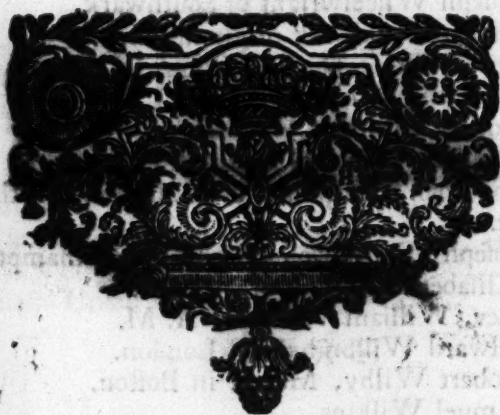
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S E R M O N I.

Elijah's prayer impartially considered.

I KINGS xvii. I.

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Abab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain in these years, but according to my word.

TH O we ought most generally to discourse upon the doctrines, and precepts of our holy religion; yet it may be expedient, and even necessary sometimes, to explain the difficult passages of the old and new Testament. When these passages are set in a true light, and are rightly understood, the

S E R M.
I.

B Bible

SERM. Bible will be read with more pleasure and
I. with greater advantage. And as wrong notions of those places have prevailed among christians themselves; so the right explication of them will not only tend to confirm their faith, but may be serviceable also in checking the growth of infidelity. For, it must be confessed, the mistakes of believers have sometimes made way for the objections of unbelievers; who commonly make their first attacks upon revealed religion by raising objections against particular places of scripture, and do not level their arguments against the true sense of them, but against those false explications, with which they were prepossessed, before they gave into unbelief. And from hence it may be hoped likewise, that the just interpretation of such places will happily recover unbelievers themselves from the error of their ways, as well as effectually prevent their making more profelytes to infidelity. When they see those places fairly vindicated, which they did not well understand, it may be expected, that they will lay aside their former prejudices, and more impartially examine the grounds of divine revelation. Among other places this before us has been very much mistaken, and very unjustly censured; for which reason I shall endeavour to explain and confirm the true sense of it in this discourse. As to the truth of the fact, that the land of Israel was afflicted with an extraordinary drought in

in the reign of Ahab, there is no room to S E R M.
doubt; because Josephus informs us, ^a that I.
Menander in his history of Phenicia had re-
lated, that there was a great drought in Pa-
lestine in the time of Ithobalus, whose
daughter Jezebel was married to king Ahab,
1 Kings xvi. 31. Josephus likewise gives
us the same account, which we have in the
Bible: "Elijah, says he, went and told
"Ahab, that God had declared to him, that
"there would be neither rain nor dew, till
"he shewed himself to him again ^b." This
circumstance of its not raining, till he had
shewn himself to Ahab again, is collected
from the begining of the next chapter,
xviii. 1. *And it came to pass after many days,
that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in
the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself to
Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.*
These words are connected with that ac-
count, which the holy writer had given of
Elijah's abode and miracles at Zarepta; and
therefore these three years are to be com-
puted from the time of his departure from
Cherith, and sojourning in that city. Now
since he staid ^c one year at Cherith after the
B 2 dry

^a Joseph. Antiq. Jud. lib. viii. cap. 13. §. 2. p. 378. Ed. Hudson. ^b Ibidem. ^c *And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.* The Hebrew phrase, עַד יְמֵי, at the end of days, signifies, at the end of the year, Gen. iv. 3. The learned Mr. L'Enfant therefore seems to be mistaken, who in his note upon Luke iv. 25. attempts to reconcile the historian with the Gospel, by supposing that the prophet staid half a year at Cherith, and three years at Zarepta.

SERM. dry weather began, and the word of the

I. Lord came to him in the third year after he left that place, and went to Zarepta; it is manifest, the drought continued more than three years. How long it exceeded that space, the historian does not relate, but our blessed Lord has exactly marked the time, Luke iv. 25. *But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land.* His account is followed by St. James, ch. v. 17. There is no difference between the historian and them, but only he relates the time in the gross, and they more exactly define, that the drought continued three years and six months. There are other ways of computing the time, and reconciling the writers of the old Testament with those of the new in this instance; but that, which I have here taken, seems to be the most easy and probable. But there is another point, in which this history is more particularly explained by St. James. For when he exhorts certain sick persons to send for the elders of the church to pray over them, because, *The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much;* he brings this example of Elijah, in the passage referred to above. *Elias, says he, was a man subject to the same passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly, that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the*
space

space of three years and six months. By sub-
 ject to the same passions, he means, that he
 was a mortal man, incident to the same in-
 firmities, as we are. Thus the same word is
 to be understood in the speech of St. Paul
 and St. Barnabas, Acts xiv. 15. When the
 people of Lystra would have offered sacri-
 fice to them, they cried out, saying, *Sirs,*
why do ye these things? We also are men of
like passions with you, mortal men as well as
 yourselves, *and preach unto you, that ye should*
turn from these vanities unto the living God.
 There is no real disagreement between St.
 James and the author of the book of Kings.
 The historian says, that Elijah assured Ahab
 there would be no rain for some years, but
 according to his word, not particularly ex-
 pressing what word, whether a solemn de-
 nunciation only, or likewise a prophetic
 prayer; and therefore St. James does not
 contradict, but farther explains the histo-
 rian, when he says, *Elias prayed earnestly,*
that it might not rain. He did not only
 predict this sad calamity, but prayed like-
 wise to God just before it came according
 to his prediction. And upon this prayer
 the objection against this history is chiefly
 grounded. It is natural for every man to
 wish well to his own country, and some
 have therefore esteemed it a very ill thing
 in Elijah, to imprecate so great a calamity
 upon his native land. And as his putting
 up this prayer is supposed to be an argu-
 ment

SERM. ment of an ill temper ; so it is made an ob-

I. jection against the authority of the scripture, that it represents almighty God answering the passionate imprecation of the prophet. For my part, I acknowledge that Elijah cannot be justified, if he prayed, that it might not rain for so long a time from a zeal for his own religion, or a private spirit of resentment against his king and country for their idolatries. God, indeed, had threatened the Jews with drought, if they gave into idolatry ; but certainly this of itself could not warrant any particular man to pray, that it might be inflicted. A good man, who heartily loved his country, would rather pray, that the judgment of God might be prevented by repentance ; and therefore we could not vindicate Elijah, if he prayed him to send this judgment upon the people for their abominable idolatries, without knowing that it was his will to punish them in this manner. Nay, I am ready to confess, that the scripture itself could not be defended, if it represented God inflicting this dreadful calamity upon the nation merely in regard to the fervent prayer of a prophet, who had a sincere and passionate concern for his honour and worship. But before we can allow the objections against this history to be good, we must see them supported by better arguments, than have ever yet been produced. Can they, who make them, prove from the original text, that Elijah desired this

this of himself, before he knew what God SERM.
intended to do? Can they prove that the sa- I.
cred historian represents God, as sending this
great evil upon the nation, merely because
it was vehemently imprecated by the pro-
phet? If it can be shewn, that there is no
foundation for these suppositions in the scrip-
tures, but that Elijah knew God would in-
flict this evil upon the Israelites, for wise and
good ends, and prayed for it, that they might
know it came from the only true God; I
hope all difficulties and objections will be
fairly removed. For surely no man will
affirm, that the supreme ruler of the world
might not, after much long suffering and
forbearance, justly punish a people for their
sins; or pretend, that it was evil in a pro-
phet to foretel the impending judgment, that
it might be prevented by their repentance.
To set this history in a true light, I pro-
pose to shew,

- I. THAT it is very unreasonable to imagine, the scripture should represent Elijah, as praying that it might not rain, from his own desire; and almighty God, as withholding rain in answer to his vehement request.
- II. THAT the prayer of Elijah proceeded from a spirit of prophecy.
- III. THAT this prayer was not the cause of the extraordinary drought; but was made,

SERM.

I.



that it might be known to be a judgment inflicted upon the nation by the true God, whose worship they had forsaken.

IV. THAT the end of this calamity predicted and prayed for by Elijah was not only to punish the people for their past sins, but to prevent their utter ruin, by recovering them from ~~sin~~ ^{their iniquities}.

I AM to shew,

I. THAT it is very unreasonable to imagine, the scripture should represent Elijah, as praying from his own desire, that it might not rain; and God almighty, as withholding rain in answer to his vehement request.

THIS is neither affirmed by the historian, nor is such a supposition agreeable to the character of Elijah, the nature of the evil inflicted, or the general sense of the Bible. It is not, I say, agreeable to the character of Elijah to suppose, that this prayer proceeded from his own desire; for he is not here introduced as a private Jew, but as a prophet of the God of Israel. When he delivered his first message to Ahab, he professed himself to be the servant of the true God. When he hid himself at the brook Cherith, and when he went to reside at Zarepta, it was by immediate direction from the spirit of prophecy; for the historian says,

says, *The word of the Lord came to him.* SERM. I.
 When he appeared before Ahab at the end of three years and a half in order to foretel the rain, it is said again, that, *The word of the Lord came unto him*; by which expression the sacred writers generally denote the inspiration and mission of a prophet. God, who delights not in afflicting the children of men, did not immediately punish the people of Israel for their wickedness, but sent his prophets to give them warning, that they might prevent the deserved punishment by a timely repentance. When iniquity therefore abounded so prodigiously in Ahab's reign, he sent Elijah to forewarn them of that calamity, which he purposed to send. In this whole affair therefore he acted as a prophet. Which then is most probable, that he wished this calamity to the nation from his own zeal; or that he prayed for it as a prophet, that it might be known to come from God? From the character of the prophet let us procede to the calamity itself, which was continual dry weather for three years and a half, and was attended with a grievous famine. God promised his protection and blessing to this nation, while they stedfastly observed his laws; but he threatened likewise to send various evils upon them, if they gave themselves up to idolatry. One of these evils was want of rain, Deut. xi. 16. *Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other*

SERM. *other gods, and worship them: And then the*

I. *Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he*
shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and
that the land yield not her fruit, and lest ye
perish quickly from off the good land, which
the Lord giveth you. That the people of
 Israel at this time had departed from the
 pure worship of the true God for many
 years, and persisted in the worship of idols,
 notwithstanding all the remonstrances of
 other prophets, is indisputable; and since
 this extraordinary drought is one of those
 evils, which God threatned to inflict upon
 them for that crime: which is most rea-
 sonable to suppose, that God sent it, because
 Elijah prayed him to send it; or that the pro-
 phet prayed for it, because he knew God
 would send it at that time? The latter, I
 think, must appear most probable to every
 considerate and impartial man; especially,
 since to judge otherwise is manifestly repug-
 nant to the general sense of the scriptures,
 as well as to the character of Elijah, and the
 nature of the calamity itself. We have no
 directions in scripture to imprecate evil upon
 other men, when we imagine they deserve
 to be corrected. We are commanded indeed
 to pray to God for such blessings as we want;
 but are no where permitted to wish evil to
 others, either as offenders against him, or
 against ourselves. When we meet with trou-
 bles, we are directed to pray to him for our-
 selves, Psal. l. 15. *Call upon me in the day of*
trouble;

trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me: but he does not give us leave to imprecate evil upon the authors of our sufferings, nor promise to send down upon them those judgments we pray him to inflict. We may implore his protection; but must not chuse what punishment he shall lay upon our enemies, but leave it to his infinite wisdom to deliver us, in what manner he judges best. And if a nation commits great wickedness, and deserves his chastisement; we ought not to pray for their destruction, but for their amendment. When Daniel confessed the sins of his people, for which they were carried into captivity, he did not pray God to continue their punishment, but to forgive their sins, ch. ix. 17, 18, 19. Tho God therefore had threatened to punish the Israelites with various national evils, if they abandoned his holy institutions; as well as promised to give them many public blessings, if they stedfastly persevered in obedience to his will: yet does he any where threaten to inflict the one, or to withhold the other, at the request of any particular men, tho ever so zealous for his worship, or ever so earnest in their requests? No certainly, but the time when, and the manner in which he would chastise that people for their sins was reserved to himself, and ordered by his infinite wisdom, according to his perfect goodness and perfect justice. Farther, as the scriptures direct not men to pray for

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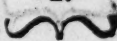
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the

SERM. the destruction of their private enemies,

I. much less to imprecate evil upon their country, when iniquity abounds; so, if any were so full of resentment, so unmerciful in their zeal, as to offer up such petitions to God, he would not regard their prayers, but would be highly offended with them. He makes not the prayers of men, but his own nature and word, the measure of his actions. If they ask what is fitting for him to give, he will hear their prayers, otherwise not; much less has he obliged himself to gratify their peevish resentments, and intemperate zeal. Many instances may be produced from scripture, in confirmation of what I have advanced. When *David* prayed earnestly for the life of the child he had by Bathsheba, he would not hear him; but took it away, that he might shew his displeasure against his sins. When the Jews were so extremely corrupted, that it was not fitting to let them go unpunished, he would not regard the intercession of the best men on their behalf. Jer. xv. 1. *Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be towards this people; cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth.* St. James tells some wicked people, *Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts,* ch. iv. 3^a. The Bible therefore no where represents

^a See also Luke ix. 55. and Jonah iv. 10. as quoted in Sermon IV. and VII.

represents God promising to do, or doing, SERM.
whatsoever men ask in a fit of pious zeal, I.
much less in a revengeful spirit; but only 
willing to give them what they ask agreeable
to his will, and that in such circumstances, as
make it fitting for him to hear their suppli-
cations. From all these considerations I con-
clude, that it is unreasonable to suppose, that
Elijah is represented as imprecating this cala-
mity from any disposition of his own whatso-
ever; or God as sending it in pure regard to
his prayer. But this will more abundantly
appear from the next particular, under which
I am to shew,

II. THAT Elijah's prayer proceeded from
a spirit of prophecy.

THIS may be proved from the history it-
self, and from the application made of it by
St. James.

I. I SAY this may be demonstrated from
the history itself. For in the text he assures
Ahab, that there would be no rain, but ac-
cording to his word; and to declare the cer-
tainty of the event, he affirms it in the most
solemn manner: *As the Lord God of Israel
liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be
dew nor rain in these years, but according to
my word.* By these words, *before whom I
stand*, he professes himself to be the mi-
nister of the true God: for as servants stand
in the presence of their masters, when they
wait upon them; so, to stand before God is
to

SERM. to be his servant ^a. He solemnly declares

I. therefore upon oath, that as the God of Israel is the true God, and he is the prophet of this true God, there should be no rain, but according to his word. When he denounced or prayed for dry weather, it would be dry weather; and when he foretold and prayed for rain, it would be rain. He could not have predicted this to Ahab so certainly, if he had not known what the will of God was. From hence therefore it is evident, that he did not speak and pray from his own desire; but from that spirit of prophecy, with which he was endowed. Of himself he could not know, that the nation would be afflicted with this great calamity for three years. Tho it was one of those evils threatened to the Jews for their disobedience, yet many other national evils were also threatened; and therefore he could not with such certainty declare, when God would send this judgment, nor how long it would continue, if he had not been divinely inspired. Before he prayed for this long drought, he knew God would send it; and consequently his prayer proceeded not from any disposition of his, good or bad, but from that certain knowledge he had of the divine purpose. And that his prayer was not the effect of his

^a The Hebrew word מַנִּי here used is explain'd in the Chaldee paraphrase by מַנִּי, which signifies *to minister*; and it appears from other places, that this explication is very just. See Deut. i. 38. x. 8. xvii. 12. xviii. 5, 7. 2 Chron. xxix. 11. 1 Kings x. 8. 1 Sam. xvi. 22.

his own wishes, but of a prophetic spirit, is **SERM.**
 abundantly evident, from what preceded his **I.**
 praying for rain. He did not pray for rain,
 before God manifested to him, that he
 would send it, ch. xviii. 1. *And it came*
to pass after many days, that the word of
the Lord came to Elijah in the third year,
saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab, and I will
send rain upon the earth. When therefore
 he prayed that it might rain, he was not ig-
 norant whether God would hear him, as
 other pious men were, who prayed for rain
 under that calamity; but he was perfectly
 assured, that God would send it according
 to his prediction and prayer. He could cer-
 tainly assure Ahab, that there would be an
 abundance of rain, ch. xviii. 26. *And Elijah*
said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink,
for there is a sound of abundance of rain.
 From the whole history you perceive, that
 Elijah acted as a minister and prophet of
 God in this affair, not wishing this long
 continuation of dry weather to his country
 from his own zeal against idolatry, much
 less from an inhumane temper; but pre-
 dicting and praying for it from the same
 spirit of prophecy, by which at other
 times he foretold national blessings or cala-
 mities. But,

2. **THAT** he did not pray for this cala-
 mity of himself, but by direction of God, is
 evident from the use and application which
 St. James makes of this history. From hence
 he

SERM. he encourages certain sick persons to send

I. for the elders to pray over them, and the

prayer, by which they were to be healed, he calls the prayer of faith, ch. v. 14. *Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick.*

This faith is one of the extraordinary gifts of the spirit, and is reckoned among them by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xii. 9. *To another, faith by the same spirit; to another, the gift of healing by the same spirit.* In another place, 1 Cor. xiii. 2. he says, *And tho I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing.* This faith was such a strong impression made by the spirit of God upon the minds of them, who possessed it, as gave them the utmost certainty, that what they declared in his name would be done; in particular, that the sick, over whom they prayed, would infallibly recover of their disorders. By this faith was the lame man healed, whose cure is related in the Acts of the apostles, ch. iii. 16. *And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.* The prayer of faith therefore procedes not from common faith, which cannot infallibly assure us of the event in such cases; but from the gift of faith, by which

which they, who had received it, knew for S E R M.
 certain, that they should be heard; tho they I.
 prayed, that it might be evident to others, ~~~~~
 that the cure was performed by the power
 of God. Moreover, that St. James applies
 this to extraordinary cures is not only evi-
 dent from the prayer used, but also from the
 circumstances attending it. And two things
 are here mentioned, which were used in mi-
 raculous healings. One is anointing with
 oil, which tho it is not particularly ordered
 in the commission, Christ gave his disci-
 ples to work miracles; yet, we find, it was
 practised by them in the execution of it,
 Mark vi. 13. *And they cast out many devils,
 and anointed with oil many that were sick,
 and healed them.* Another circumstance is
 their praying over the sick in the name of
 the Lord, *And let them pray over them in
 the name of the Lord;* for this also was used
 in extraordinary cures, as appears from the
 history of those wrought by the apostles,
 Acts iii. 6. But the certainty of the event
 is what most plainly demonstrates, that the
 prayer, by which the sick were to be healed,
 proceeded from a miraculous faith. He does
 not advise them to send for the elders, if God
 peradventure will hear them, but he assures
 them, that *The prayer of faith shall save the
 sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.* I ap-
 peal to every one, whether this can be un-
 derstood of that faith, with which all christ-
 ians should address their prayers to God.

C

When

SERM. When ministers now pray for a sick man,

I. can they be certain that he will recover, and that his sins will be forgiven him? No, they can only desire God to heal him, firmly believing that he can do it; but they must pray in submission to his will, and leave the event to him. That prayer therefore, which was to have a certain effect, proceeded from an extraordinary faith. The apostle applies not the case of Elijah to the ordinary petitions of good men, but to the prayers of them, who were endowed with extraordinary faith, and knew for certain, by the spirit, that what they pronounced, or prayed for, would be done. The occasion indeed of these prayers, which St. James exhorts the sick to desire, was not common. For he speaks, as I apprehend it, of them, who had committed some great sin, for which sin they were afflicted with sickness. Some of the Corinthians were punished with sickness, and others with death, for their scandalous abuse of the Lord's supper, that their example might not be followed by others, and this holy ordinance turned into an intemperate festival. If any man, who was thus afflicted, truly repented of his sins, St. James exhorts him to send for those elders, who possessed the gift of faith, and assures him of a cure by their prayers. That this was the case is evident, because he adds, *And if [tho'] he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him: for there is no*

man

man without sin, and therefore he must in- SERM.
tend some sins, for which the sickness was I.
inflicted upon him. And this is agreeable
to the form, our blessed Lord used in the mi-
raculous cures; he wrought upon some sick
persons, Mat. ix. 2. *And Jesus seeing their
faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of
good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.* Now
if the prayer, which St. James directs the
sick to desire, proceeded not from a common,
but from an extraordinary faith; then the
prayer of Elijah, by which he encourages
them, must be acknowledged to have been
of the same kind. He does not give them
encouragement from thence to hope, that
every man should recover, for whom prayers
were made in the exercise of common faith,
because the prophet, by such a prayer, had
brought dearth and rain on his country:
but he encourages them to make use of an
extraordinary gift, which then remained in
the churches; because, by the prayer of Eli-
jah proceeding from the same miraculous
faith, that great calamity was both inflicted
upon, and removed from, the kingdom of
Israel. If God by the prayer of faith in
Elijah sent extraordinary drought to a wick-
ed people, how much more might the sick
penitents hope to have their bodily distem-
pers healed, and their sins forgiven, through
the prayer of those elders, who possessed the
gift of faith? And their being thus mira-
culously healed, as well as the sickness in-

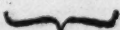
S E R M. flicted upon them, tended to convince them

I. of their sins in violating the laws of Christ, and to engage them to a more careful observation of their duty. When it is said therefore, that he *prayed earnestly*, or as it is in the original, *praying he prayed*, this denotes not the earnestness of his own desires, but the steadfastness of his faith. It being revealed to him from God, that rain would be denied and given to the nation according to his word, he doubted not, but prayed in faith, being certainly assured, that the event would follow. What I have been arguing may be incontestably proved from these words of St. James, *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*. For the original word ^a is never used to express the fervency of our own desires, but what is wrought in the mind by the spirit of God. When St. Paul speaks of that faith, which is an extraordinary gift, and of the other miraculous powers of the holy Ghost, he says, *But all these worketh^b that one and the selfsame spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will,* 1 Cor. xii. 11. The *inwrought prayer* therefore is the same with the prayer of faith, which proceeded from an extraordinary motion of the spirit, by which they were infallibly assured, that the event would follow their word. By this prayer great things have been done, which he proceeds to demonstrate by the example of Elijah. I deny

not,

^a Ἐνεργημένη.

^b Ἐνεργεῖ.

not, that God has remarkably heard the SERM.
earnest prayers of righteous men, who cried I.
to him in distress; but I think it sufficiently 
appears from the express words of the history,
and from the application St. James makes of it,
that the prayer of Elijah proceeded not from his own desire,
but from a prophetic spirit and miraculous faith. I
proceed to shew,

III. THAT Elijah's prayer was not the cause of this drought; but was made, that it might be known to be a judgment inflicted upon them by the only true God, whose worship they had forsaken.

IT was revealed to him from God before his prayer, and therefore it was the will of God to send it, before he prayed. His prayer did not move the supreme Being to inflict the evil upon the nation; but he prayed for it, because he knew, by the spirit, that it would be inflicted. This is very plain. But here it may be asked, why he should pray for that, which he might not desire of himself, and which he knew would certainly come. The answer to this is very easy, and such as may give good satisfaction to every one, who will impartially consider. It therefore came upon them at the prayer of Elijah, that it might be known to come from that God, to whom his prayer was addressed. God did not inflict this calamity upon the people merely to shew his power
C 3 and

SERM. and sovereignty, but for wise and good

I. ends, which could not be answered, unless
 it was certainly known to come from him. The evil itself indeed might induce them to consider of their ways, whether they had not done wickedly in worshiping the idols of Jeroboam; but its coming upon them, when Elijah prayed for it to the God of Abraham, might work a more powerful conviction in them. When any great calamity was inflicted, or any wonderful work done by the ministry of prophets, some proper words were used, by which it might be made evident to them, who were concerned, that it was done by the hand of God. When Elijah foretold this drought and the succeeding rains to Ahab, he affirmed it in the name of the true God, that the king might be convinced by the event, that neither the one nor the other was the result of natural causes, but the effect of the overruling power of God. He prayed also just before the drought began, and before the rain fell, that it might still more certainly appear both to the king and people, that all natural causes were under the government of the God of Abraham, and that their idols had no power over these things. His prayer therefore was made for their conviction. And thus our blessed Lord, when he raised Lazarus from the grave, thanked the Father with an audible voice, not for his own sake, but for the conviction of the spectators,

John xi. 42. *And I knew that thou hearest* SERM. I.
me always: but because of the people, which
stand by, I said it, that they may believe that }
thou hast sent me. And as the prayer, which

Elijah made on this occasion, shewed from whence these events came, so it proved him to be a true prophet. He was sent to reprove the nation for their idolatries, and to persuade them to return to the worship of the true God; and that his warnings might take effect, it was necessary he should give them some certain and infallible proof of his divine mission. And this also was sufficiently manifested by these unusual changes of the weather coming according to his prediction, and at the time, when he prayed for them to the God of their fathers. He prayed not therefore, as one who was ignorant what would be; but that the king and people of Israel might be convinced, that these things were done by the power of God, and might be induced to repent at his admonition. When he proposed a fair method for the people to try, whether Baal or the God of Israel was the true God; and it was his turn to sacrifice, he came near and said, *Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things, at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back*

SERM. again, 1 Kings xviii. 36, 37. This gives

I. us reason to suppose, that his prayer for dry weather and rain was conceived in some such words as these, and was also designed to make it evident to the people, that these events were ordered by the God of Abraham, and that Elijah was really his prophet.

IV. THE end of this calamity predicted and prayed for by Elijah was not only to punish the people for their past sins, but to prevent their utter ruin, by recovering them from sin.

GOD is not only to be considered as a being of infinite goodness, but also as the wise and just ruler of the world; who has a right to the homage of all people, and may therefore justly punish them, who continue obstinate in their wickedness. Nor is it inconsistent with his goodness to inflict evil upon a nation, because it is graciously designed to recover them from their pernicious courses, as well as to punish them for their past wickedness.

iniquity

I. THIS long continuance of dry weather was a just punishment for their past sins. God, who has a right to the obedience of all men, had a more special claim to that of the people of Israel. For wise ends he had distinguished them from all other nations, and chosen them to be his peculiar people; he had given them his laws, and taken them under his immediate care

care and protection. While they worshiped S E R M.
him according to his own appointments, he I.
promised to deliver them from all their ene-
mies, and to bless them with prosperity:
but if they followed the idolatry of other
nations, he threatened to punish them with
various evils suitable to their crime, and
proper to recover them from their sins. One
of the judgments threatened to them, if
they were disobedient to his will and gave
into idolatry, was the want of rain, as has
been already observed from the words of
Moses. This could not but be a great cala-
mity to them, because their country was
mountainous, and wanted the early and the
latter rain; the one being necessary to pre-
pare the soil for tillage, the other, to bring
the fruits of the earth to maturity. When
therefore the course of nature was altered,
and these usual rains were withheld, this
caused a great scarcity, and was a severe
punishment to the whole kingdom. That
God might at this time justly execute his
threats upon them is manifest, because they
had for many reigns rebelled against him,
and been deaf to all the admonitions of his
prophets. Jeroboam having led the people
into idolatry from political views, the suc-
ceeding princes followed his steps; but
Ahab, who reigned at this time, outdid
them all in wickedness. He sold himself to
work wickedness in the sight of the Lord,
through the instigation of his idolatrous
wife,

SERM. wife, ch. xxi. 25. In his reign there were

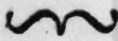
I. but seven thousand men in the whole kingdom, who had not bowed the knee to Baal, ch. xix. 18. It was their own sin therefore, not the prayer of Elijah, which drew upon them this severe chastisement from God.

2. THIS punishment was likewise inflicted in order to bring them to serious consideration, and to reclame them from their idolatries. Their sin could not but expose them to many evils in this life, and tend to deprive them of happiness in the next. It was therefore an act of goodness in God to send such judgments, as might convince them of their sinful courses, and induce them to reform, if they would seriously consider. Extraordinary drought was very proper to produce this good effect. It being one of those evils threatened in their law, and coming upon them according to the prayer Elijah made to the God of Israel, was sufficient to convince them, that this God, whose worship they had forsaken, was the only true God, and the author of all temporal good things. They, no doubt, made their supplications to their idols; but as no rain came in answer to their prayers, and the dry weather continued, this might shew them the sin of their idol worship, and convince them, that he alone was God, in whose name Elijah prophesied. For this end the drought was continued three years, that,

that, if possible, it might have a good influence upon the people. At first perhaps they might think, that, notwithstanding the declaration Elijah made, the ceasing of the early and the latter rain, in their proper seasons, was the effect of some natural causes, and hope the next year would be more favorable, and produce greater plenty. Had it lasted but one year therefore, it could not be thought, they would be much affected; but when it continued a second and a third year, this might reasonably make them acknowledge, that it was not the effect of natural causes, but the hand of the God of Israel; whose worship they had cast off, and in whose name Elijah had pronounced this calamity.

THUS I have gone through the four heads proposed, and, I hope, have made it plain to every capacity, that the objections urged against the scripture account are without foundation. To raise the objections, unbelievers are forced to put things in a wrong light, falsely supposing that Elijah made this prayer of himself, and that God is represented as sending this dreadful calamity upon the nation purely in answer to his prayer. But this is their own sense, not the sense of the sacred writers. For Elijah is introduced by them acting as a prophet, who predicted what he knew God would inflict, and prayed that it might come according

SERM. cording to his prediction; that if they re-

I.  repented not at his warning, the event at least might convince them, that it was inflicted by the God of Israel, and so lead them to repent of their idolatry. Wherein then is he to be blamed? Certainly no more than if he had predicted some more distant national evil, or merely as a good man had forewarned them, that their sins would bring down upon them some of those publick calamities, which were denounced in their law. Unbelievers themselves will not presume to blame the prophets for predicting the captivity, or any other national calamity of the Jews; and yet nothing is more manifest, than that he acted in this affair from the same spirit of prophecy, and is therefore unworthy of the least censure. From hence it follows likewise, that God is not represented as afflicting the nation in answer to his importunate intreaty, but sending his prophet to denounce an evil, which for their crying iniquities he would justly inflict upon them, according to the threats contained in his law, which they had impiously violated by long repeated transgressions. And is this account unworthy of God? Might he not after much long suffering, and repeated warning, consistently with his justice and goodness, punish this nation for their sins? But I shall conclude with two remarks.

I. THAT

I. THAT we may not presume from SERM. this history of Elijah to wish evil to private persons, or to the nation wherein we live, because we judge them to be erroneous and wicked. He did not act as a private subject, but was directed by the spirit of prophecy. He was sent in quality of a prophet, to forewarn a wicked people of the judgments God would send, if they continued impenitent. We should not therefore inconsiderately offer to imitate him, but should observe the commands, which God has given to private persons, and follow the example of good men, when they were not under the influence of a prophetic spirit. With these we should rather pray for the conversion, than for the destruction of them, who err from the truth. When we see men indeed living in dangerous errors, we may endeavour to convince them by proper arguments; when we see them pursuing wicked courses, we may kindly persuade them to repentance, by setting before them the evil consequences of their sins: but we may not wish any evil to them from a spirit of resentment and zeal, even tho they be our enemies and persecutors. Our Saviour says, *Love your enemies, bless them who curse you, do good to them who hate you, and pray for them, who despitefully use you, Mat. v. 44.* As to the nation, tho we should suffer for

SERM. a good conscience, we ought not to pray

I. for its destruction, but for its reformation;
 according to the good example of St. Paul,
 Rom. x. 1. *Brethren, my heart's desire and
 prayer to God for Israel is, that they might
 be saved.*

2. WE should take great care, how we
 apply passages of scripture. The prayer of
 Elijah was extraordinary, not proceeding
 from a common, but from a miraculous
 faith; and therefore St. James applies it to
 cases of the like kind only, not encouraging
 christians to hope, that whatsoever they ask-
 ed in ordinary cases would be given them;
 but to make use of a gift, which then sub-
 sisted in the church. We should not there-
 fore presume to apply this to ourselves in
 common cases. Should any zealots of more
 heat than knowledge take encouragement
 from hence to imprecate evil upon them;
 who dissent from their forms of worship;
 they would certainly be in the wrong;
 because Elijah was moved by a spirit of
 prophecy to denounce what God would
 inflict, whereas they must only be hurried
 on by their own passions to wish evil to
 others, without any divine warrant. But
 it is to be feared, that many pious people
 mistake these texts, and, by drawing wrong
 inferences from them, create unnecessary
 trouble to themselves. Because St. James
 says, *The prayer of faith shall save the sick;*
 and,

and, *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*, ch. v. 15, 17; SERM. I.

and for their greater incouragement, refers them to this history of Elijah, they imagine their faith is not sincere, because they are not heard; and think they should be as certainly heard as the prophet was, if their faith was strong enough. But they should consider, that St. James speaks of that faith, which was an extraordinary gift of the spirit, which none could exercise, but they to whom it was given: and therefore, where the extraordinary gifts of the spirit are not given, no man is required to have this faith. Instead therefore of disquieting themselves by suspecting their faith, let them learn to submit to the will of God, who does not see fit to hear their prayers. What God has promised to give us upon certain conditions, that we may assuredly expect, when we have performed those conditions; but as for temporal things, health, success in business, and the like, he has not absolutely promised to give us them, but to do what will be most for our advantage upon the whole; and therefore we must pray in submission to his will, and leave the event to his infinite wisdom. This is the faith to be exercised in such cases, an entire confidence in his goodness, power, and wisdom, that he can and will do what is most for our good,
if

SERM. if we sincerely love him, and keep his

I. commandments. God grant, that we may

all of us do this, that all events of life,
prosperous or adverse, may finally issue in
our true and eternal felicity, through Jesus
Christ, to whom, &c.



SERMON



S E R M O N II.

Wherein charity excels faith and hope.

I COR. xiii. 13.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity.

THE infinitely wise and blessed S E R M. II.
God delights to imploy his
power for the good of his crea-
tures, which teaches men what
use they should make of those
natural abilities, extraordinary gifts, and
other advantages, they have received from
him. They should not hide their talents
in a napkin, nor use them out of vain osten-
tation; but should improve them in doing
good to others from that principle of bene-
volence, which moved the supreme Being
to confer his blessings upon themselves. A
due sense of the obligation to improve every
gift of God for the benefit of others, is
D what

SERM. what our blessed Lord and his apostles in-

II. deavour to impress upon the minds of all christians, by various considerations. And St. Paul particularly having shewn the Corinthians, that their extraordinary gifts were not conferred upon them for any other purpose, than to make them more useful, ch. xii. 11. *The manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal*, proceeds to convince them of the reasonableness of pursuing this end in the exercise of them, by a very familiar and instructive comparison. As every member of the natural body, however dignified above others, exercises its proper function for the good of the whole; so they in the church of Christ, who were indowed with any extraordinary gifts, ought to exert them for the benefit of the whole community. He therefore justly blames them for their defects in point of charity, and persuades them to behave towards one another with greater and more hearty benevolence. As several other things prevailed among them, which were inconsistent with this excellent virtue; so, it seems, they had not due regard to it in the exercise of their spiritual gifts. They rather affected to exercise those gifts, which made a great shew, as speaking with diverse tongues, than others, which would be more useful to the church. Of that rich variety of gifts therefore, in which they abounded, he directs them to exercise those in their publick assemblies,

assemblies, which were most for the improvement of all in true knowledge and piety. *But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way,* ch. xii. 31. SERM. II.

where the original word ^a does not signify, *Desire earnestly*, but, *Be zealous in exercising*, the best gifts. If you will be so zealous in the use of spiritual gifts, exercise those which are most useful; but yet I will direct you to something, which is more excellent than these, and which you ought to observe with the utmost zeal and diligence. This *more excellent way* is the practice of christian charity, as he explains himself in the beginning of this chapter, in which he recommends this virtue to them as more necessary, useful, and lasting, than all their uncommon gifts, ver. 1—8. He advances farther in the text, and affirms that charity is greater than faith and hope, which are preferable to those miraculous powers they so highly valued. These three virtues faith, hope, and charity, are united in every true christian, but we must suppose St. Paul to consider them separately, what they are strictly speaking in themselves, when he determines which of them is the greatest. By faith, he does not mean that extraordinary faith mentioned in the third verse, which was a certain assurance in the minds of them, to whom it was given, that the event would follow their words, and the miracle they

D 2

^a Ζηλῶτε.

SERM. they were going to perform in the name of
 II. Jesus Christ, would certainly succede. The
 { faith in my text is set in opposition to this,
 as well as to the other extraordinary gifts of
 the spirit; and is therefore to be understood
 of that faith, which is necessary for all christ-
 ians, and may be defined, A firm assent
 to the truth of the christian religion from a
 real conviction of the judgment, particular-
 ly, with respect to that revelation, it has
 made us of another world. From this faith
 springs hope, which is a stedfast expectation
 of that future blessedness, which we believe.
 Both these are very useful virtues, and great
 means of perseverance in the christian life;
 but are yet inferior to charity, which is not
 here to be taken in a restrained sense for
 almsgiving; but for that universal benevo-
 lence towards all men, which engages us to
 perform the several duties, we owe to them
 in their places, and to do them good, as we
 have opportunity. When St. Paul declares
 charity to be the greatest of these virtues,
 he has no design to depreciate faith and
 hope; but to prevent their relying too
 much on their faith, as they valued them-
 selves too much on their extraordinary gifts;
 and to engage them to the practice of mu-
 tual love, without which, their faith and
 hope would be in vain. With the same
 view I shall explain his words at present,
 and shew more largely on what accounts
 charity is the greatest of these virtues. And,

I. IT may be justly esteemed the greatest S E R M.
of them, because it alone makes us like to II.
God our blessed Creator. He is the most perfect being, after whose image we were originally formed; and therefore, that must be the most excellent in us, which most nearly resembles his perfections. But what resemblance can we bear to him in the two former of these virtues? He is absolutely independent, and possessed of all possible perfection. He receives not the knowledge of the truth from any other being, but comprehends all truth himself. He is infinitely happy, and has no expectation of receiving any greater felicity than what he ever possessed. Faith and hope therefore, which are suitable to the state of such ignorant and imperfect beings, as we are, can have no place in him, who is so perfectly wise, so unchangeably happy. But tho these virtues are infinitely below his most perfect nature, yet love is so far from being inconsistent with it, that it is his most amiable attribute, and his greatest glory. *God is love*, says St. John, 1 Ep. iv. 16. because he has not only the greatest power, but has likewise the greatest propensity to do good; and is therefore most perfectly benevolent, because he is infinitely happy. The happiness of other beings, which is derived from him, cannot possibly lessen his own; which perfection of his nature places him above all those passions, which are incompatible with

SERM. love. The imperfection of men, their in-

II. ordinate self love, and fear lest the good of

others should interfere with their own, are the causes of their refusing to do them good, and envying their advantages; but God being most consummately, and independently happy, has the greatest delight in communicating his happiness. He created the vast universe, that he might impart such degrees of perfection and happiness to the several orders of beings, as are suitable to the end of their make; and there is no part of the whole creation but what loudly proclaims, that he is *good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*. He had compassion upon fallen men, and wisely contrived such a method of saving them, as might most clearly manifest his love: For *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*, John iii. 16. Good will therefore to all men, and compassion towards the miserable, stamp the likeness of God upon our souls, and by gladly imploying our knowledge, riches, power, and all our abilities in doing them good, we act like him. If we sincerely desire the happiness of all men, and promote it as much as we can by succouring the necessitous, by persuading sinners to repentance, by assisting our friends, by forgiving injuries, and shewing mercy to our enemies, we are perfect in love, even *as our*

Father which is in heaven is perfect, who is SERM.
continually showering down his blessings II.
upon all, who is *slow to anger and plenteous*
in mercy, and maketh his sun to rise on the e-
vil and on the good. Tho none of us therefore
can resemble him in faith, and hope, which
are below the supreme dignity of his being;
yet we may all of us be like him in love.
He has indowed us with so many capaci-
ties of doing good, and love has so many
useful properties, such various methods of
shewing itself, that the meanest person in
the world may transcribe this divine perfec-
tion into his own mind. Tho he has no-
thing to bestow on the poor, he may admi-
nister comfort to the afflicted, recover the
sinner from the evil of his ways, wish well
to all, judge charitably, and forgive wrongs.
Whatever our condition is, we may be *fol-*
lowers of God as dear children, being *kind*
one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one
another, even as God for Christ's sake has
forgiven us, Eph. iv. 32. We are therefore
more frequently exhorted to imitate the
goodness of God, than any other of his
attributes; because there is none of them,
in which we can more nearly resemble him,
than we may do in this. I acknowledge
that faith and hope may have a tendency
to transform us into the likeness of God, as
our belief in the christian religion, which
discovers to us his inconceivable love to man-
kind, may incline us to imitate him; and

SERM. the hope of that glorious kingdom, which he

II. has promised to them who obey him, may
 engage us to make a good use of all our
 abilities: but then, as love is the very image
 of God, and therefore claims the prehem-
 inence over these virtues; so it more directly,
 and more powerfully influences us to be like
 him.

2. CHARITY excels these virtues, be-
 cause it is a more noble principle of our
 obedience to the will of God, with respect
 to our conduct towards other men. He has
 commanded us to perform several duties to-
 wards them, according to the relation there
 is between us, and to do good to all as we
 have opportunity; but none of our actions
 will have any worth in them, if they do
 not procede from true benevolence. *Tho I*
bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and tho
I give my body to be burned, and have not cha-
rity, it profiteth me nothing, ver. 3. For this
 reason we are frequently exhorted to let all
 our things be done in love, and in love to
 serve one another, that none of our actions
 may lose their just value, and be adulterated
 by wrong principles. It must be this divine
 principle, which gives intrinsic worth to all
 our actions, and renders them truly amiable
 in the sight of God; which can produce
 that tender compassion of heart, that cheer-
 fulness in giving, which are necessary to
 please him. For *God loveth a cheerful*
giver, who readily contributes to the re-
 lief

lief of the distressed; and consequently will S E R M.
in other respects approve them, who per- II.
form the duties they owe to others from that
sincere benevolence, which makes their ac-
tions perfectly free, generous, and obliging.
Whatsoever regard men may have to a fu-
ture recompense, if they are not moved by
true charity, what they do will not be an
acceptable sacrifice to God. Our belief in-
deed in the christian religion, which so won-
derfully displays his grace, should not only
incline us to love him, but to love our neigh-
bour also; but then, as love to him is a no-
bler principle of our obedience to his will
than faith; so is benevolence to our neigh-
bour a more perfect principle of our con-
duct towards him. Not that faith and hope
should have no influence upon us in per-
forming our duty towards other men, or are
inconsistent with acting from true charity.
The promises of God should allure and
animate us to do good, his threats should
restrain and deter us from all hatred and
injury; and therefore these virtues cannot
but be of great use in the begining of a re-
ligious life, in time of persecution, in any
severe trials of our integrity: but yet, if
they are not united in the heart with true
charity, and are considered in themselves
abstracted from this, they must be very im-
perfect, if not altogether useless. Our own
inward sense of things may convince us of
this. We cannot entertain so good an opi-
nion

SERM. nion of one, who does a favor to another
II. man with a view to procure some advantage
to himself, as we should have, if he did the
same action out of mere benevolence. And
will not the supreme Being then be better
pleased with them, who abstain from inju-
ry, and do good to their neighbours from
this noble principle, than with others, who
are restrained from the one by the fear of
punishment only, in the other have a sole
regard to their own good in the world to
come? It is certain from the words of
St. Paul just quoted, that he will not ap-
prove the largest bounties to the poor, which
flow not from a benevolent heart; tho the
donors really believe in Jesus Christ, and are
indowed with the faith of working mira-
cles. From whence it is plain, that these
principles are only valuable, when they be-
get a sincere affection in our breasts, and
cooperate with that in the performance of
those duties, we owe to our neighbour; but
when they are not attended with love to
him, but merely respect our own interest,
they will be of little or no account. That
God will be better pleased with them, who
do good from sincere benevolence, than with
others, who are influenced only by faith, is
manifest from his own nature. He cannot
be more happy, than he is in himself; and
has therefore no self interest in dispensing his
favors, but does good to his creatures from
pure disinterested kindness. This principle
is

is the most delightful to men, as well as SERM.
most acceptable to God. The view bene- II.
factors have to a future recompense in their
donations, no way regards the objects of
their bounty; but that compassionate air of
the countenance, that kindness of expression,
that obliging manner in giving, which are
the genuine effects of true charity, cheer the
hearts of the receivers, as much as the gifts
themselves. Every good office done to others
is then most grateful, when it manifestly
appears to flow from sincere good will and
friendship. This principle is likewise abundantly
the most delightful to ourselves, as
well as to the objects of our charity; for
this alone can excite those tender emotions
of heart, which make all acts of charity
truly pleasant: and which they know nothing
of, who are influenced by meaner principles,
or are overcome by mere importunity. It is not
our belief in the future rewards of charity, but
the consciousness of having done good from pure
benevolence, which gives us the most exquisite
pleasure in reviewing our acts of beneficence.
And as benevolence is the purest, so it is the
most active principle; for tho faith and hope
may be unfruitful in good works, charity
always moves men to act well towards their
neighbours, and to do them good in proportion
to their abilities. By this I am led to
observe,

SERM. 3. THAT charity is the greatest of these virtues, because it is abundantly the most useful. The whole train of St. Paul's reasoning in this epistle directs us to this conclusion. He prefers charity to knowledge, because *Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth*, ch. viii. 1. and declares prophecy to be greater than tongues, because it was far more serviceable to the church, ch. xiv. 5. He who spake with diverse tongues in the assembly might astonish them, who did not understand him; but he, who prophesied in a known tongue, administered instruction, exhortation, and comfort to all. Who then can doubt, that when he says charity is the greatest of these virtues, he has an eye to its superior, and more extensive usefulness? It is plain from our make and condition, that we are not born for ourselves only; and our holy religion directs us, *Let no man seek his own: but every man another's wealth*, 1 Cor. x. 24. We are indeed both as men, and christians, furnished with several capacities, and means of doing good; and therefore that must be the most excellent virtue, which draws forth these abilities into action. That charity does this will evidently appear, if we compare these three virtues together. Now faith being a firm assent to the truth, hope a stedfast expectation of the accomplishment of those promises, in which we believe, are lodged in our own minds, and relate to our own future happiness. By these virtues,

tues, I confess, we may be good examples SERM.
to others, and excited to the performance of II.
those duties we owe to our neighbour; but
they do not consist in a good disposition to-
wards him, nor are they employed in acts
of beneficence. Charity on the other hand
relates to others, either considered as ex-
pressing the temper of our minds, or those
actions which naturally flow from it: It is
not wholly taken up about ourselves, but is
concerned for the good of others, and im-
plies itself in kind endeavours to promote
their happiness. Charity, as described by St.
Paul, *seeketh not her own*, ver. 5; not so as to
neglect the good of others, much less so, as
to injure them for her own advantage. Cha-
rity most effectually restrains men from all
injurious actions; for what inclination can
he have to wrong and oppress others, who
wishes well to all, and can freely part with
his own to relieve the necessitous? This vir-
tue is not only the spring of all acts of
friendship and liberality, but influences men
to behave well towards their neighbour in
all respects. For this reason our blessed
Lord declares it to be one of those two
great commandments, on which hang the
law and the prophets; because he who
loveth another, as St. Paul explains it, Rom.
xiii. 8, 9. hath fulfilled the whole law. *For
this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou
shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt
not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet;*
and

SERM. *and if there be any other commandment, it is*

II. *briefly comprehended in this saying, namely,*

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self. The man, whose breast is warmed with true charity, will not do an unjust, or cruel thing to any man; for as the apostle adds, *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law,* ver. 10. So far is he from ill designs, and injurious actions, that this benign principle will dispose him to form generous schemes, and exert himself in doing good. He will not neglect any one of his talents, but will improve them all in the most useful manner. He will communicate his knowledge, distribute his riches, and imploy his power in protecting the innocent and oppressed. His charity has no limits, but like the bounty of his Maker extends itself to all mankind; and models his disposition towards them according to their respective circumstances. He delights in the good, and has pity on the wicked. He rejoices with the prosperous, and grieves with the afflicted. He judges of the actions of others in the most favorable light, and is willing to be reconciled to them, who have given him just offence. Nor does this virtue only govern the temper of his mind, but reigns likewise in all his actions. He comforts the troubled, and gives to the necessitous. He encourages the good, and labors to reform the wicked. He helps the distressed, and provokes them who are rich to

to liberality. He indeavours to preserve SERM.
peace, and to reconcile differences. He II.
forgives injuries, and overcomes evil with
good. He is affable to all men, and hum-
bly condescends to serve the meanest of his
fellow creatures in the lowest offices of
friendship. His benevolence is not confined
to them, who are of his own persuasion;
but he wishes well, and does good to all,
whatsoever their opinion be in matters of
religion. Them, who are mistaken, he
will labour to inform and convince by mild
instructions, and by persuasive arguments;
but if these means prove unsuccessful, he
judges charitably, and exercises forbearance
towards them. But can it be said, that
faith and hope, considered in themselves, are
so extensively useful, so industriously im-
ployed in doing good? Alas! where men
are not inspired, and directed by true cha-
rity, do we not find that they may be in-
wardly convinced of the truth of christiani-
ty, and entertain the hope of everlasting
life; tho they are so far from being kind
and merciful, that they are unreasonably
selfish, and cruelly refuse to the distressed
that relief, which they are able to give?
Does not this very opinion, that they are
sounder in the faith than others; and have
consequently, as they imagine, a better right
to the favor of almighty God, too com-
monly throw a sour leaven into their tem-
per, and incline them to do the most cruel
things

S E R M. things to them, who are not of their mind;
 II. things no less condemned by the christian
 institution, than repugnant to the laws of
 natural religion?

4. If we consider what influence these virtues have upon each other, and upon our chief happiness, charity will deserve to be esteemed the greatest, because it is of the highest importance. Our blessed Lord, by his precepts and example, has taught us the most perfect charity; and the great end of that faith, which he requires, of his whole institution indeed, is to ingage us to the constant practice of this virtue. *Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned, 1 Tim. i. 5.* When faith therefore produces this universal benevolence in us, it is made perfect and effectual; will recommend us to the favor of God, and intitle us to a reward hereafter: but it will be of no use, nay will be mere presumption, if it has not attained its proper end and perfection, as being destitute of love, and good works. St. James shews very largely, that our faith will be in vain, and never bring us to heaven, if it be not fruitful in all works of mercy, and righteousness, ch. ii. 14. *What doth it profit, my brethren, tho a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?* St. Paul no less plainly assures us, that no faith will avail any thing to our salvation, but that which inspires and warms
 our

our breasts with universal love. *For in Je-* SERM.
sus Christ, says he, neither circumcision a- II.
vaieth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but
faith which worketh by love, Gal. v. 6.

Faith indeed, when it procedes from a sincere love to truth, and careful information of ourselves, may in some measure fit us for a state of perfect knowledge, which heaven is described to be; but if it be considered also as a state of perfect sanctity, as it really is, it cannot be sufficient to prepare us for it, unless we are habitually disposed, and inured to works of charity. Tho a man ever so firmly assent to the christian doctrine, and stedfastly expect a future state, if he remains uncharitable, he is utterly unfit for heaven. Faith and hope have no aptitude to make us happy, but as they incline us to love, and produce a holy conversation. *And tho I have all faith, not only to receive the truth, but even to work the greatest of miracles, and have not charity, I am nothing, of no account with God, and shall have no reward in the future state.* Charity is placed by St. Peter, 2 Epist. i. 5. among those things, which we are to add to our faith, as that without which we shall be unfruitful in our lives, and incapable of an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Charity recommended Cornelius to the favor of God, before he believed in Jesus Christ; but faith in him will not procure this blessing to

SERM. a christian, if he is not truly charitable in

II. his prevailing temper, and conduct. Faith

and hope therefore will not be serviceable to us here, nor qualify us for a better world without charity; from whence it follows, that they are inferior to this virtue, from which they derive their greatest worth, and in which their perfection consists. Love on the other hand is not only the perfection, the life of these virtues, but is in itself most excellent, and naturally disposes us for the world above. Nothing is more perfective of human nature, nor more powerfully exalts us into the likeness of God; and therefore nothing can so effectually prepare us to live with him in a state of perfect rectitude and felicity. It frames the soul into a right temper for heaven by refining it from all those uneasy and turbulent passions, which render men incapable of true happiness; by infusing a serenity, a joy like that which reigns above in the spirits of the blessed, whereby it fits us for their society, and makes us capable of their exalted pleasures. But nothing perhaps will set the excellency, the necessity of this virtue in a stronger light, than that special regard which will be shewn to it in the day of judgment, that higher reward which will be conferred upon it in the future state. These things are future indeed, but we may form just notions of them from the representations set before us in scripture, particularly, in the discourses
of

of Christ. In the xxvth chap. of St. Matt. S E R M.
 he supposes himself placed on his judgment seat, and all men standing before him to II.
 give an account of their actions, and to receive their sentence. They, who have lived in the sincere practice of charity, will be placed on his right hand; but all, who were unkind and unmerciful, will be set on his left hand, ver. 34. *Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the king shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: nar-*

SERM. *ked, and ye clothed me not : sick, and in pri-*

II. *son, and ye visited me not. Then shall they*
 { *also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we*
thee an hungred, or a thirst, or a stranger,
or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not
minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them,
saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye
did it not to one of the least of these, ye did
it not unto me. Our blessed Lord instances
in these real acts of kindness, because they
are the surest marks of an inward principle
of benevolence. When men are actuated
by this, they will not only speak comforta-
bly to their brethren, but will relieve them
in their distress. In this awful account
they, who are set on the left hand, are
supposed to believe in Christ, and to hope
for heaven as well as the other on his right
hand; but yet, as they were strangers to
the sincere, and cheerful exercise of this ex-
cellent virtue, they will not, you see, be ap-
proved of him, nor admitted into his joy.
The grand inquiry will not be, how rightly
men have believed, how strongly they have
hoped; but whether their lives were an-
swerable to their faith and hope; whether
they loved their neighbour not in word only,
but in deed and in truth. It is worth while
to observe, how our blessed Lord and St.
Paul speak with relation to this matter.
Our blessed Lord says, Matt. x. 42. Who-
soever shall give to drink unto one of these
little ones, a cup of cold water only in the
name

name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. St. Paul on SERM. II.

the other hand says, *Tho I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no charity, I am nothing,* ver. 2. So much does the lowest expression of sincere love excel the highest degree of faith! Nor will this virtue be less distinguished in the future state, than it will be in the day of judgment. They who are conscious to themselves, that they do what good they can from this generous principle, have not only the sweetest complacency in their actions here, but will also enjoy the most exalted pleasures above. And the righteous Judge, who will proportion the rewards of pious men to their usefulness in this world, will place the brightest crown on that virtue, which was the most generously, the most extensively useful in this life. This leads me,

5. To compare these virtues together with respect to their duration, which will also demonstrate to us, which of them is the most valuable. We shall not obtain our highest perfection, our ultimate happiness, till we arrive at heaven; and what is agreeable to that state, and will be perfected in it, must deserve to be considered as the most excellent in this world. St. Paul uses this argument to prove charity far preferable to all those extraordinary gifts, for which the Corinthians so highly valued themselves; because these would cease in time here, and

SERM. be of no use in the future state, ver. 8. *Cha-*

IL *rity*, says he, *never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* And if this be an argument, that charity is more considerable than those gifts, it will also prove, that it excels faith and hope. Those things, which are now future, are the objects of these two virtues. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*, Heb. xii. 1. But these things will be present to them, who are in heaven; who will then have received the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls, and will be for ever fixt in the possession of that consummate happiness, which they now expect. In this blessed state, these two virtues, which are suitable to our present condition, and very useful here, will have no room, but will end in the fruition of perfect, and neverceasing happiness. They will indeed be rewarded, if they had a due influence upon our practice; but the exercise of them will cease, when charity, which excels them in the judgment of the apostle, will appear to be more excellent, because more lasting. As it is that disposition which fits us for heaven, so it will accompany us thither; and will be so far from ceasing, that it will be then raised to the highest degree of perfection. When we have left this mortal state, in which many things take up our thoughts, and are apt to steal away our affections, not only

only our love to God, but our charity for SERM.
one another will be more pure, intense, and II.
perfect. All those defects in good men, that 
difference of opinion, which now unjustly
lessens their esteem for one another; their
too passionate concern for their own hu-
mor, honor, and interest, will then be
done away, and they will see nothing in
others, but what is worthy of their affec-
tion, will feel nothing in themselves, which
can hinder their love from rising to its just
perfection. Charity therefore will not only
pass into heaven, but will be wonderfully
improved; and when faith shall vanish in
the accomplishment of the divine promises,
when hope shall be turned into possession;
this virtue will never be out of use, but will
be continually exercised in the most perfect
manner. And as the want of charity, and
the prevalency of those passions, which are
contrary to it, disturb all societies, and are the
principal causes of many of those evils, we
here suffer; so the complete, and uninterru-
pted exercise of it will make heaven a
place of perfect tranquillity, and continual
rejoicing. The inhabitants of that blessed
world will be united by indissoluble bonds
of friendship, and will have the highest sa-
tisfaction in communicating their happiness
to one another. O blessed state, in which
there will be no misunderstanding, no diffe-
rence in opinion, no clashing interests, nor
any thing else, which can disunite their af-
fections;

SERM. fections; because they will be perfect in
 II. knowledge, in holiness, in felicity, and will
 ~~~~~ have the highest complacency in each other!

THESE particulars, I think, take in the sense of the apostle, and very plainly prove, that charity is more excellent than faith and hope; because it more powerfully transforms us into the likeness of God, and is the noblest principle of our obedience to his will; because it is more useful to others, more necessary to our own chiefest good, and will be for ever exercised in the future state, where faith and hope will intirely cease. Let these considerations induce us,

I. NOT to indulge any temper in our minds, any practice in our lives, which are contrary to this excellent virtue. Let us consider, what spirit we are of, and if we find any thing in ourselves inconsistent with charity, which is the very temper of christianity, let us for ever banish it from our hearts. Let us not bear ill will against our neighbour; nor envy his prosperity; let us not give way to inordinate self love, nor to a revengeful spirit. All these things are as contrary to love, as light is to darkness; so that it can have no place in that breast, where these passions are predominant. When St. Paul therefore exhorts the Ephesians to mutual love, he presses them in the first place to get rid of these passions, ch. iv. 31. *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from*

*from you, with all malice.* And let us also watch against every thing of this kind, as what will make us unlike to God, who is love; and not only hinder us from doing good, in which charity always delights, but likewise put us upon doing what is evil and injurious. Charity, by promoting the happiness of others, will bring peace and satisfaction to ourselves, while the contrary passions will be no less uneasy, and troublesome to us, than they are disagreeable, and injurious to our neighbours. The practice of love, which tends to perfect our nature, will fit us for eternal joys; but all rough, and unfriendly habits will debase our reason, and, unless corrected in time, may deprive us of future bliss.

2. THE excellency of this virtue should make us earnestly desire to possess it, and to be always aiming at greater perfection in the exercise of it. From this consideration the apostle persuades the Corinthians, *to follow after love*, ch. xiv. 1. We should therefore not only expel all bitter, and cruel passions out of our hearts, and abhor all ungenerous, and wrongful actions; but endeavour to acquire a charitable temper, and to bring ourselves to the settled practice of love. For this end let us contemplate the undeserved mercy of God, and the unparalleled love of Jesus Christ to us miserable sinners; let us reflect upon the innate pleasantness, and the happy effects of this virtue; let us consider  
how

SERM. how reasonable and just it is upon all accounts to love one another, and forget nothing which can have any force and tendency to mould us into a temper universally benevolent. And as all habits are brought to perfection by frequent acts, let us accustom ourselves to wish well to all, to shew kindness as we have opportunity, that we may be fervent in charity, and ready to do good upon all occasions: that we may breathe nothing but love and good will, and always imploy our several abilities for the good of mankind.

II. 3. WE should *provoke one another to love and good works*. We are obliged to promote the happiness of all men, especially of our friends, as much as lies in our power. For this reason we should never excite them to hatred, nor put them upon revenge, nor persuade them to any resolution, and practice, which is uncharitable; for these things will create them much trouble and uneasiness here, and may possibly deprive them of future blessedness. We should therefore maintain love and peace between them, and be very careful, that we do not divide their affections by any indiscrete word, or any unkind office; where any difference has arisen, we should labor to reconcile them; where any coldness of affection appears, we should persuade them to be more fervent in charity. Thus we shall shew a sincere



sincere love towards them, and shall take SERM.  
the surest way to render them happy. A II.  
kind and charitable temper will keep their  
minds easy, without which, no true hap-  
piness can be enjoyed in any state. The  
exercise of love, in all the offices of it, will  
give them real satisfaction, whensoever they  
reflect upon their past actions. Nay, uni-  
versal benevolence manifested by a suitable  
conduct will qualify them for heaven; so  
that by persuading them to charity, we  
shall advance their future as well as their  
present good. But that we may effectually  
prevail with them, let us set them a good  
example; for what can be so persuasive as  
love, what a more suitable and powerful  
means of infusing into them a benevolent  
temper, than the constant practice of sin-  
cere and undissembled charity? And that  
we may incite and engage others to this  
excellent virtue by our own example, let  
us consider how agreeable it is to our holy  
religion, what preference is given to it in  
the word of God. *And above all these*  
*things, says St. Paul to the Colossians, put*  
*on charity, which is the bond of perfectness,*  
*ch. iii. 14.* Agreeable to which is the ex-  
hortation of St. Peter: *And above all things*  
*have fervent charity among yourselves; for*  
*charity shall cover the multitude of sins, 1 Pet.*  
*iv. 8.* May we therefore invite, and per-  
suade one another to the practice of love  
by

SERM. by our words and actions, that we may

II. mutually contribute to our present comfort, and may for ever live together in the celestial mansions, where we shall be perfect in happiness, because we shall be perfect in love.



SERMON



## S E R M O N III.

The condemnation of unbelievers  
just.

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JOHN viii. 24.

*I said therefore unto you, that ye  
shall die in your sins: for if ye  
believe not that I am he, ye shall  
die in your sins.*



OUR blessed Lord in his discourses S E R M.  
often denounced the wrath of III.  
God against such of the Jews, as persisted in unbelief. John iii.  
18. *He that believeth on him, is  
not condemned: but he that believeth not, is  
condemned already, because he hath not be-  
lieved in the name of the only begotten Son of  
God. In my text he declares to them, that  
if they did not believe him to be the Mes-  
sias, they should die in their sins; or go  
out of the world with the guilt of sin upon  
their consciences, and suffer the sad effects  
of*



SERM. of it in the future state. When the apostles

III. preached to the Gentiles, they also declared, *that all, who believed not in Jesus Christ, should be damned, according to the commission, he gave them not long before his ascension, Mark xvi. 15, 16. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.* In other places unbelief is represented to be a damnable sin, and the deplorable condition of them, who die in it, is set forth. 2 Thes. ii. 12. *And for this cause, (because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved) God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* Rev. xxi. 8. *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.* These denunciations against unbelievers may perhaps seem very severe to some men, for is it not extremely hard, they will say, that any one should be damned for not receiving a particular scheme of religion? Faith in general is an assent to the truth of a proposition upon such evidence, as the nature of it admits. Faith in Jesus Christ is an assent to the

the truth of these propositions, that he was S E R M.  
the Messias expected by the Jewish nation, III.  
and that he came from God to declare his will to mankind: but it is certain, men cannot believe what they please, and must always judge, as the evidence appears to them. Why then should a Jew, an Hea- then, or any man be condemned to everlasting punishment, because he did not discern the truth of such propositions, as these just mentioned? To this I answer, that the condemnation of unbelievers would be severe indeed, nay very unjust, if the truth was not clearly proposed to them, and sufficiently attested; if they had not capacity to judge of this matter, or it was an error merely speculative, for which they will be condemned; if their unbelief did not proceed from vitious principle, and cause them to continue in such sins, as naturally tend to deprive them of true happiness, and by their unavoidable consequences prepare them for a state of anguish and torment. But this is far from being the case supposed in these threats. The infinite goodness of God in giving being to mankind, his wonderful grace in sending his only begotten Son Jesus Christ to deliver them from their sins, and to bring them to a state of perfect and everlasting felicity, give us just reason to conclude; that he will not make any thing the cause of their exclusion from heaven, but what has in its own nature a tendency  
to

SERM. to render them incapable of it; or in some  
 III. circumstances prevents that repentance of  
 their sins, that obedience to his laws, which  
 are necessary to their forgiveness, and salvation. Of this latter kind we may justly suppose that unbelief to be, against which damnation is denounced in the christian institution; as will evidently appear from the scripture, if we consider,

I. THE nature of that unbelief, against which future condemnation is denounced.

II. THE reason of that punishment, which is denounced against, and will be inflicted upon unbelievers.

I SHALL therefore endeavour to explain,

I. THE nature of that unbelief, against which future condemnation is denounced.

THE end of Christ's appearance in the world was to reform the errors of men, and to turn them from sin to God; and therefore faith in him was required, because it was absolutely necessary to effect these ends. They, who believed not in him, would not reform their lives, and for this reason remained in the guilt of their sins. But that the nature, and aggravations of this sin may more evidently appear, and the righteousness of the punishment denounced be more plainly



ly manifested, I shall distinctly consider this **SERMON**  
matter. And, **III.**

I. IN those places of the new Testament, where damnation is denounced against unbelievers, it is supposed, that the gospel was preached to them, and the evidences of its truth laid before them. Christ preached the gospel to all Judea himself. He shewed the rulers their sin in making void the commandments of God by their traditions, and exhorted them, and all the people to repentance. *Mat. iv. 17. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* And as he professed, that he came from God, and was that prophet, whom they expected; as he taught them a more spiritual worship, and delivered to them the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead: so he abundantly justified his pretensions, and confirmed his doctrine, by those numerous miracles, which were done before their faces. And if the miracles of Moses proved, that he was sent from God to deliver his will to the Israelites; if the wonders performed by the succeeding prophets were valid proofs of their mission; did not the more numerous and useful miracles of Jesus demonstrate, that all his doctrines were true, and that he was indeed that prophet, whom the nation expected? It is true, the Jews were forbidden to regard any signs and wonders, which were done by false prophets to seduce them, *Deut. xiii.*

SERM. I—5; but from hence it will not fol-

III. low, that they ought not to regard the miracles of Jesus, who did not attempt to draw them from the worship of the true God; but taught them to worship him in a way more pure, and better suited to his most perfect nature. He professed likewise to be that prophet, who was to come from the true God, and who, whensoever he appeared, was to prove his mission by miracles done in his name. He might therefore justly appeal to his miracles for the truth of his doctrine. John x. 37. *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not.* The disciples of Jesus also preached the gospel in Judea, and afterwards fully declared his religion to the Gentiles. They shewed the latter the unreasonableness of their idolatry, and exhorted them to reform their worship, and their lives. Acts xvii. 29, 30. *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone graven by art and mans device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.* They did not require them implicitly to believe, that they came from the only true God; but they preached a religion worthy of him in itself, and attested their mission by innumerable miracles. That there might be no reason to doubt of what they taught and affirmed concerning the resurrection of Jesus, and the general resurrection

tion of the dead, they raised the dead before their eyes. No means therefore of knowledge, no means of conviction were wanting to Jews, or Gentiles; but every thing was done, which could be thought necessary to convince them of their sins, and to illuminate them with the knowledge of the truth. But,

SERMON.

III.

2. NOTWITHSTANDING all this, they wilfully refused to consider attentively what they heard, and would not fairly and deliberately inquire into the truth of his doctrine. We may observe, that the unbelieving Jews would not honestly examine the evidences proposed to them, but obstinately resisted all means of conviction. When Jesus healed the man, who had the withered hand, they did not seriously consider the greatness of the miracle, but maliciously contrived how they might take away his life. Matt. xii. 14. *Then the Pharisees went out, and held a counsel against him, how they might destroy him.* When he had raised Lazarus from the dead, instead of fairly considering this instance of divine power, *The chief priests consulted, that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him, many of the Jews went away, and believed in Jesus,* John xii. 10, 11. They did not therefore discern the truth, because they wilfully shut their eyes against the light; nor did they understand, because they stopped their ears, that they might not hear the



SERM. truth so plainly preached, and so often in-  
 III. culcated. John iii. 19. *And this is the con-*

*demnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Matt. xiii. 15. For this peoples heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. They among the Jews, who considered what they saw and heard, believed in Jesus Christ. John iii. 2. The same [Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles, that thou doest, except God be with him. John vii. 31. And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these, which this man hath done? The unbelievers were such as would not seriously consider, but put from them the word of God, and judged [by their actions manifestly declared] themselves unworthy of everlasting life, Acts xiii. 46. From the same causes proceeded the different effects of the gospel among the Gentiles. They, who attentively heard the apostles, and impartially inquired into the reasonableness of their doctrine, were convinced. Acts xiii. 48. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the*

*word*

word of the Lord: and as many as were or- SERM.  
dained to eternal life, believed. The word III.  
ordained<sup>a</sup> has no relation here to any decrees

of God concerning the eternal state of men, but to the inward disposition of them, who heard the apostles preach; as many as were well disposed, and set themselves to hear their doctrine, concerning the method of obtaining eternal salvation proposed by the gospel, believed. The unbelievers were such, as did not honestly attend to, and duly examine what they heard. They would not give themselves time to consider, whether the doctrine of the apostles concerning one God was not more rational, than their idol worship; and whether the miracles done by them were not sufficient proofs of their coming from him to declare his will to mankind.

3. THAT, which inclined them to reject the christian religion without inquiry, when it was so clearly, so advantageously proposed to them, was their sinful lusts, and inveterate customs. They loved their sins more than truth, and therefore would not give a fair hearing to that doctrine, which was so opposite to their vices. Many indeed of them, who believed in Jesus, had been very notorious sinners, as appears from what he

F 3

said

<sup>a</sup> Of St. Paul it is said, Act. xx. 13. For so he was appointed, *τοιοῦτο γὰρ ἦν διατεταγμένος*, not certainly by any necessary cause, but by his own voluntary determination. And therefore it is rightly translated in our Bible, *For so had he appointed*. See Whitby and Limborch upon the place.

SERM. said to the chief priests and elders of the  
 III. people, Matt. xxi. 31. *Verily I say unto you,*  
*that the publicans and the harlots go into the*  
*kingdom of God before you.* But then all  
 sins have not an equal tendency to blind  
 the understanding, and to prevent a serious  
 and impartial consideration. Such sinners  
 as these, tho very wicked in their lives, were  
 not full of spiritual pride, and had no secu-  
 lar interest and honor to support and main-  
 tain. When therefore they were made sen-  
 sible of that wretched condition, to which  
 their sins had brought them, and the mercy  
 of God was promised to them upon repen-  
 tance; they humbly confessed their sins, and  
 gladly imbraced the offers of salvation. But  
 other sins there are, which more directly  
 tend to corrupt the judgment, and to give  
 it a bias against the truth; of which kind  
 was the pride and selfconceit of the Phari-  
 sees, who valued themselves very highly for  
 their superior sanctity in a nice observation  
 of external ceremonies, while they neglected  
 the weightier matters of the law. Matt.  
 xxiii. 23. *Wo unto you Scribes and Phari-*  
*sees, hypocrites: for ye pay tithe of mint, and*  
*anise, and cummin, and have omitted the*  
*weightier matters of the law, judgment, mer-*  
*cy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and*  
*not to leave the other undone.* So great ne-  
 vertheless was their vanity, that our blessed  
 Lord said unto them, John ix, 41. *If ye*  
*were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye*  
 I say,



say, *We see; therefore your sin remaineth.* SERM. III. Such also was their ambition, and inordinate love of present honors. They would not follow the humble Jesus, lest they should lose that high esteem, which the people had for them, and expose themselves to reproach and censure. John v. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?* Ch. xii. 42. *Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also, many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.* The unbelievers therefore of the Jews were such, as did not sincerely love God and religion; but were more solicitous to secure their interest and honor, than to understand and obey his will. John viii. 47. *He that is of God, beareth Gods words: ye therefore bear them not, because ye are not of God.* They were so far from loving him, and desiring to know his will, that they lived wickedly, and hated the truth. John viii. 44. *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.* His doctrine was not calculated to gratify their lusts, and promote their secular interest; and therefore they could not abide it. John iii. 20. *For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.* They had indeed several vulgar prejudices

SERM. against Jesus. John vii. 27. *Howbeit we*

III. *know this man whence he is: but when*  
*Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he*  
*is. And, Out of Galilee, said they, ariseth*  
*no prophet, ver. 52. But the excellency of*  
*his doctrine, and the greatness of his mira-*  
*cles would have overcome these prejudices,*  
*if their pride, ambition, and other vices*  
*had not prevented their consideration, and*  
*given them an unreasonable aversion to his*  
*doctrine. They hated him also for re-*  
*proving their wickedness, which was an-*  
*other cause of their infidelity; but this was*  
*purely their own fault, and no argument,*  
*that his doctrine was not fit to be received*  
*as the will of God. The case was much*  
*the same with the unbelieving Gentiles.*  
*Their evil customs, which they could not*  
*resolve to leave, and their secular interest,*  
*to which they were violently attached, pre-*  
*vented their inquiry and belief. 2 Cor. iv.*  
*3, 4. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to*  
*them that are lost; in whom the god of this*  
*world hath blinded the minds of them which*  
*believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel*  
*of Christ, who is the image of God, should*  
*shine unto them.*

4. THE unbelieving Jews and Gentiles  
 being thus hindered, by their sinful preju-  
 dices, from duly considering the evidences  
 proposed to them, did not receive and pro-  
 fess, but obstinately rejected and opposed  
 the christian religion. This was indeed the  
 natural

natural consequence of their refusing to con-  
sider with due attention and impartiality ; for  
no evidence, how clear, how substantial so-  
ever it be in itself, can work upon and con-  
vince them, who will not consider it with a  
sincere, impartial mind. How should they  
believe in Jesus, who were so prepossessed  
with pride and other vitious habits, that  
they would not attend to his doctrine, and  
had no sincere love to truth, but were de-  
voted to the love of sinful pleasures? They  
did not only reject his religion, without due  
consideration, but opposed it likewise with  
all their might and power. The unbeliev-  
ing Jews frequently attempted the life of  
Jesus, as has been proved already ; and  
could never satisfy their restless malice, till  
they had procured his death by false accu-  
sations against him, and by repeated im-  
portunities with the Roman governor. Af-  
ter his ascension they did not oppose his  
apostles by argument, but by force. Acts v.  
17. *Then the high priest rose up, and all they  
that were with him, (which is the sect of the  
Sadducees) and were filled with indignation.  
And laid their hands on the apostles, and put  
them into the common prison. They did not  
only persecute the disciples, but also insti-  
gated the Gentiles against them in diverse  
places ; many instances of which you will  
find in the Acts of the apostles. To give  
one only at present, we read, Acts xiii. 50.  
that at Antioch in Pisidia, The Jews stirred  
up*

S E R M.  
III.



**SERM.** *up the devout and honourable women, and the*  
**III.** *chief men of the city, and raised persecution*  
 against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. The same spirit of opposition and cruelty animated the Gentiles, who did not believe in Jesus. They did not only continue in unbelief, but treated the apostles and other christians with the utmost incivility and unmercifulness, sometimes through the persuasion of the Jews, and at other times from their own blind zeal. But if any of the unbelieving Gentiles did not procede so far, as some, I confess, did not; yet they persisted in their idolatry and other vices, wilfully rejecting the gospel of Christ, through some evil lust and passion which prevailed over them, and hindered their inquiry. Unbelief therefore is charged upon men as a wilful sin. John v. 40. *And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.* Luke xiii. 34. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them, who are sent unto thee: how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not?* Our blessed Lord upbraided them, who received not his doctrine, with their incredulity, as a wilful crime, Matt. xi. 20. *Then began he to upbraid the cities, wherein most of his mighty works were done; because they repented not. Wo unto thee Chorazin, wo unto thee Bethsaida: for if the mighty works, which*

*which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*

SERM.  
III.  


5. THE consequence of this wilful unbelief was their continuance in their former sins and idolatries. When our blessed Lord lived upon the earth, the whole world lay in wickedness; the Jews having made void the commandments of God by their traditions, and the Gentiles monstrously deviated from the law of nature by the most stupid idolatries, and the most heinous immoralities. The design therefore of his coming was to recover men from their errors to the knowledge of the truth, and from their sinful customs to the practice of true piety. For this end, faith in Jesus was required, and had a suitable effect upon them, who believed. They renounced their past sins, and lived in obedience to his precepts; but others, who believed not, persisted in their evil ways, the Jews perverting the law of God by their own traditions; the Gentiles worshiping idols instead of the true God, who revealed himself to them by the gospel, and adhering to their vicious courses, instead of yielding obedience to the authority of Christ. They were required to repent of their sins, which they obstinately refused to do. Unbelief therefore includes disobedience to the laws of Jesus, as well as not assenting to the truth of his religion; which is plain, beyond contradiction, from  
St.

SERM. St. Paul's words, where he calls unbelievers,

III. children of disobedience. *Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience,* Ephes. v. 6. In another place they are with him such as obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. From all that has been said, it is exceeding manifest, that when damnation is denounced against unbelief, it is not abstractly considered for not assenting to the truth only; but the cause from which it proceeds, and the consequences which it produces are likewise comprehended. It consists in not assenting to the truth of christianity from such a love to some vice, or another, as prevents an honest inquiry, and a sincere obedience to the institution of Christ. I procede now to consider,

II. THE reason of that punishment, which is denounced against, and will be inflicted upon unbelievers.

THE justice of their sentence and condemnation will sufficiently appear from these two considerations.

I. THEIR unbelief is a wilful sin of manifold guilt and great aggravations. It plainly appears from the places alleged under the preceding head, that it is not supposed to arise from weakness of capacity to discern the truth; but from the obstinacy of their wills in refusing to consider those evidences,



evidences, which are laid before them. No S E R M. man deserves blame for not believing, when III. the truth is not proposed to him, or he is not able to discern the evidence of it; but for refusing to consider it, when fairly proposed, he may be justly condemned. This is a wilful fault, which he might avoid, and which therefore will be deservedly laid to his charge. It is without doubt the duty of rational beings to love truth, and to imploy their faculties in finding it out; and tho they cannot believe contrary to evidence, yet they may refuse to attend to, and impartially weigh those arguments which are proposed to them. Thus wilfully to neglect the means of information is a moral evil, because they make not that use of their faculties, which they ought to make, as beings indowed with understanding and reason. It is certainly the will of God, that his rational creatures should not be unconcerned about their notions, but endeavour to form a true judgment of things in matters, which relate to their chiefest good. It was evil therefore in the Jews to deviate from the laws of God by their traditions, and in the Gentiles to transgress the law of nature by their idolatries. But when God was pleased to send Jesus Christ to declare his will, and to afford them such clear and mighty evidences of his mission; when he, and his disciples professed, that they came from God, and required them to renounce their  
sins,

SERMON. sins, and so live in obedience to his com-

III. mandments on pain of future condemnation; their sin, in resisting the truth without due examination, was greater in proportion to those means of knowledge and conviction, which were given them, and those motives to consideration and obedience, which were set before them. Their neglecting to inform themselves shewed, that they were set upon their sins, and would not receive the christian religion, because they would not reform their lives. They believed not, because they would not part with their sins, nor live according to the pure laws of christianity. In their unbelief therefore were comprehended many evils; a wilful disregard to truth in the most weighty concerns; a wilful neglect of inquiring, when it was proposed to them in the most awakening manner; an obstinate perseverance in those sins they were called to forsake, together with a voluntary disobedience to the laws of Christ. Now for men not to examine matters fairly and impartially in an affair of so great importance, but stubbornly to resist all means of conviction, through a vicious indolence, a fond attachment to their vices, or an immoderate love of present things, is a great and wilful sin, and must justly offend the God of truth. Such was the fault of the Jews. Acts vii. 51. *Ye stiffnecked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do*

do ye. Such likewise was the case of the **SERM.**  
Gentiles. 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. *If our gospel be* **III.**  
*hid, it is hid to them, who are lost: in whom*  
*the god of this world hath blinded the minds*  
*of them, who believe not, lest the light of the*  
*glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of*  
*God, should shine unto them.*

2. **THE** punishment denounced against unbelievers is the natural and unavoidable consequence of their unbelief. For if they continue in their sins, they cannot obtain the remission of them; and therefore that unbelief, which hinders their repentance, must of course render them incapable of happiness in the future state. This was undoubtedly the miserable state of the unbelieving Jews. That pride and ambition, that covetousness and extortion, that spite and malice, which were the causes of their unbelief, and disobedience to the christian institution, made them incapable of true happiness, and justly exposed them to future misery. Tho the gospel had not been preached to them, their vile hypocrisy, and other wilful sins would have put them out of the favor of God, and brought upon them the punishment, they justly deserved. So long as they remained impenitent, they could not be fit for a state of consummate happiness in heaven; and therefore they were required to believe in Jesus Christ, as a means of reforming them from their iniquities. And had they left their sins, and  
lived



SERM. lived according to the precepts of Jesus

III. Christ; had they become as pure and upright, as charitable and just, as meek and lowly, as the christian religion obliges men to be; they would then have been acquitted from their sins, and prepared for salvation, by the good effects of their faith. No less incapable of true happiness were the Gentiles by persisting in their foolish idolatries, and vitious customs; by not reforming their worship and manners in obedience to the gospel of Christ. His gospel gave them a clearer knowledge of their duty, and set before them more powerful motives to obedience; and therefore their not attending to these means of knowledge and conviction, but wilfully resisting the grace of God, mightily aggravated those sins, which were before sufficient of themselves to shut them out of heaven, if they did not timely repent. It is impossible therefore, that such unbelievers, as damnation is denounced against in the scriptures, should be saved; unless a wilful contempt of the truth, when plainly proposed, and an obstinate disobedience to the divine commands, when delivered to them with sufficient means of conviction, can fit them for heaven. It is not by the mere will of God, but by the necessary consequence of their own sinful choice, that unbelievers will be excluded from heaven, and punished with everlasting destruction. Therefore *Christ says, John*

iii. 36. *He that believeth on the Son, hath* SERM.  
*everlasting life: and he that believeth not the* III.  
*Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God* ~~~~~  
*abideth on him:* that wrath, which he had  
deserved by his former transgressions, and  
which he is still exposed to, through his  
unbelief, which prevents his reformation.  
He did not promise pardon to sinners  
through Jesus Christ, but on condition of  
their leaving their past sins, and living bet-  
ter for time to come, in conformity to the  
gospel. Since then that unbelief, to which  
future condemnation is threatened in the  
christian institution, is a wilful crime of  
many and great aggravations, and the suf-  
ferings of unbelievers are the unavoidable  
consequence of their own choice, I think  
it cannot be denied, that their condemnation  
is just. I shall now conclude this discourse  
with some inferences from what has been  
said. And,

I. IF the unbelief, for which men will  
be condemned, is a wilful disobedience to  
the gospel, this cannot affect the state of  
them, who never heard of Jesus Christ.  
They believe not indeed, but then they  
have not the means of believing; and  
therefore their unbelief cannot be imputed  
to them as a wilful sin. For *Faith cometh*  
*by hearing, and hearing by the word of God:*  
*And how shall they believe in him, of whom*  
*they have not heard? and how shall they hear*  
*without a preacher?* Rom. x. 17, 14. To

G

suppose

SERM. suppose that all men will be damned, who

III. believe not in Jesus Christ, tho he was never preached to them, is affronting the goodness and equity of God, in order to magnify the necessity of faith in his Son. What the scripture says of the necessity of faith is to be understood of them, to whom the gospel is preached; but where is it said, that he will damn them for their unbelief, who never heard of Christ? Their unbelief arises not from wilful disobedience, but from want of means; and if God condemned them for this, he would be indeed a hard master, reaping, where he had not sowed; and gathering, where he had not strewed. Not that all such unbelievers will be saved, for they will be judged according to the law, which was given them; tho not according to the gospel, which they never heard. Rom. ii. 11, 12. *For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law. They will therefore be acquitted or condemned, as they have, or have not lived up to the light afforded them: ver. 15. Which shew the work of the law written in hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another; In the day, when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. And if God will deal in this equitable manner with such, as never heard the gospel; is there any*



any reason to doubt, that he will treat SERM.  
them, to whom it has been preached, with III.  
all that goodness and justice, which may be  
expected from a being infinitely perfect? If  
there are any who truly fear him, and live  
righteously; but yet after due search and  
examination cannot discern the truth of the  
christian religion, through some incapacity:  
I say, if there be any such, whose unbelief  
arises from this cause, and does not procede  
from vitious principles, may we not hope  
that God will be gracious to them, notwith-  
standing their unbelief? But let all unbe-  
lievers take care, that neither pride, impu-  
rity, nor any other vitious habit prejudice  
them against the christian religion, and pre-  
vent their consideration and belief; since he  
will justly exclude all such from that happi-  
ness, of which they have made themselves  
incapable, and suffer them to sink into that  
misery, which their sins deserve.

2. FROM the nature of that unbelief,  
which will condemn men, we may per-  
ceive, wherein that faith consists, to which  
eternal salvation is promised. The former  
is a wilful disobedience to christianity, and  
the latter therefore must be considered as a  
principle of obedience to the command-  
ments of Jesus Christ. Faith was required  
of them, to whom Christ was preached;  
because it was necessary to engage them to  
obey his institution. They would not pay  
any regard to his authority as a lawgiver,

SERM. if they did not believe in his name. True

III.  faith therefore is not a mere assent to the doctrine of Christ, nor a confident reliance on his merit; but such a firm persuasion of the truth of his religion, as effectually engages us to make it the rule of our lives. No faith can intitle us to salvation, but that which recovers us from the power of sin, and reduces us to the obedience of Christ. *For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love,* Gal. v. 6. And for this reason, as unbelief is in some places explained by disobedience; so what is promised to faith in one place, Mark xvi. 16. *He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved;* is elsewhere promised to obedience, Heb. v. 9. *And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.* From whence it is certain, that faith without works is dead; and that no faith can be any means of saving us, but that, which exerts itself in a holy life.

3. FROM hence we may see the danger of what may be called a practical unbelief; when men believe in the religion of Jesus Christ, but keep not his commandments. There is in them that, which makes unbelief criminal and condemning, which is a wilful disobedience to his laws. As unbelievers are so much in love with their vices, that they will not receive the gospel; so it is some indulged lust, which makes the faith  
of

of these ineffectual, and hinders their obedience. What then is their faith better than unbelief, if they equally break the commandments of Christ? It cannot compensate for the want of a good life, but will rather aggravate their sins. To them, who profess Christ in words, but in works deny him, we may apply the words of St. Paul, Rom. ii. 25. *For belief verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy belief is made unbelief.* Our Lord himself assures us, that those believers, who live not according to their faith, will be ranked with unbelievers at the great day, when he will separate the good from the wicked. Luke xii. 46. *The Lord of this servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.*

4. WE should take care, that there be in none of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. For if unbelief proceeding from vicious principles was so great a sin in them, to whom the gospel was first preached; will it not be as great, nay greater in us, who have been trained up in the knowledge of Christ, and cannot therefore be reasonably supposed to have so many prejudices against it, as the Jews and the heathen had, who were brought up in other religions from their youth, and had the prepossessions of education to struggle against.



SERM. against. They, who are educated in a coun-

III. try, where they have the scriptures in their own tongue, want no means of knowledge and conviction. Whatever offence they may take at some things, which have prevailed among christians, they have the writings of the apostles, in which they may find the pure doctrine of Christ. If they have a love for truth, here they may as plainly know his true religion, as if those corruptions had never been introduced. And if they will with due attention consider his religion, they will perceive, that it is in itself worthy of God. All the doctrines are such, as we may reasonably conclude, God would reveal to mankind; and all the moral precepts are so good, that they may be justly esteemed his laws. Nor is it easy for them to judge of the intrinsic goodness of christianity only, whether it be in all respects worthy of God, if they will consult the scriptures; but they may also have external evidences for it, sufficient to convince them, that it really came from him. By the same means as we know the truth of any ancient facts, they may be assured of the truth of what the scripture relates concerning the life, and miracles of Jesus. Historical and moral evidence is not indeed of the same nature with mathematical demonstration; but it is suitable to the nature of those things it is employed about, and amounts to a sufficient degree of certainty. And as this kind of evidence gives

gives intire satisfaction to the mind, so it is **SERM.**  
better suited to the capacity of the greatest **III.**  
part of mankind. But there is not time to  
discourse more largely on these things. How-  
ever this may be safely affirmed, that we  
have better evidences for the truth and un-  
corruptness of the writings of the new Tes-  
tament, than we have for the genuineness and  
purity of any other writings of the same an-  
tiquity: because they were not only tran-  
scribed for private use, but to be publicly  
read in the christian assemblies; and the  
facts therein contained are not only credible  
in themselves, but are also confirmed by co-  
temporary writers, and by the publick offi-  
ces of the christian church. And if Jesus  
taught those doctrines, and performed those  
miracles, which are recorded in the scrip-  
ture; they, who will impartially consider  
these things, must acknowledge, that he  
was sent of God, his doctrines being wor-  
thy of him, and his miracles such as could  
not be done without his power, or per-  
mission. But if men, who have been train-  
ed up in the belief of christianity, and come  
to have some doubts about it, will not se-  
riously consider both the intrinsic and ex-  
ternal evidences we have for it, tho they be  
greater than they judge sufficient in other  
cases; but incline to that side which is fa-  
vorable to their sensual lusts, and are led by  
the love of vice to renounce this most ra-  
tional institution, and most excellent me-

SERM. thod of salvation without due inquiry ; what

III. can be more just than their condemnation?

~ Their condemnation will not only be just, but their punishment more severe ; because they have wickedly renounced the faith, and the hopes of eternal felicity, for that momentary pleasure, which arises from the gratification of their foolish and hurtful lusts ; which are as inconsistent with their true happiness here, as with the laws of christianity and their future good. The great sin and terrible consequences of apostatizing from christianity, and relapsing into unbelief, through fear, or any other vitious motive, is represented to us in the epistle to the Hebrews ; which I intreat you to consider. Let us therefore hold fast the profession of our faith, and let us live according to our faith, that we may not be such as draw back to perdition, but such as believe to the salvation of their souls ; which God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ.

SERMON





## S E R M O N IV.

Elijah's calling down fire from heaven vindicated.

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2 KINGS i. II, 12.

*Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty: and he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.*



ALL men should do justice to the memory of the deceased, as well as to the character of the living; and put the most favorable construction upon their actions from the same principle of humanity, which would lead them

SERM.  
IV.

SERM. them to judge charitably of their cotemporaries. It is a mean and wicked thing to misrepresent and calumniate the dead, who cannot speak for themselves; which crime will be the greater, if they deservedly bore a good character, and are allowed to have acted well in the general course of their lives. We should not rashly suspect evil of such men, but impartially weigh all the words of an historian, and view all the circumstances of their action, before we judge of their conduct in any particular case. And if there is room for a favorable opinion, charity and justice oblige us to think the best of them. But, alas, how little is this rule observed in judging of the actions of some great men, whose names are recorded with honor in the scriptures! Their conduct in some cases is not only vilified by such, as are enemies to divine revelation; but for want of due consideration is misunderstood and ill thought of by them, who heartily believe the Bible to be the word of God. We have a remarkable instance of this in the history before us. The prophet is supposed by some eminent writers to have acted in this affair from such a legal and zealous, such a passionate and fierce, such a vindictive and exterminating spirit<sup>a</sup>, as suited very well

<sup>a</sup> Some actions of good men, says Mr. Kettlewell, particularly under the old Testament, were justifiable whilst that dispensation stood, which would be criminal in us now, who are under a law more perfect. Such was Elias's calling

well with the rough and four dispensation SERM. IV.  
of the law, but would no way become the mild and gracious dispensation of the gospel. 

Strange opinion! Was not that evil under the law, which is evil under the gospel? Would the immutable Being then approve a spirit, which he would abhor at this time? Can any one seriously think, that an angry wish of the prophet would have taken effect? Was it in his own power to destroy these men by fire, or would the merciful God regard a passionate prayer then, which he would now reject with displeasure? How does it appear, that Elijah was moved by a passionate and fierce, a vindictive and exterminating spirit? He is not said by the historian to have acted from such a temper, which is a strong presumption, that his conduct did not procede from thence. The sacred writers are wont honestly to confess their own failings and the faults of other good men; and since the mean compliance of Aaron, the passion of Moses, the adultery

ing down fire from heaven upon his adversaries, which agreed well enough with that state. Works, Vol. II. p. 795.

As much as if he should have said, If you will needs imitate that legal zealous spirit Elias acted by, whatever you pretend, you act not like my disciples, whose spirit and genius ought to be more tender and merciful. Dr. Scott on Luke ix. 56. Vol. II. p. 13.

You ought to consider, That you are not now under the rough and four dispensation of the law, but the calm and peaceable institution of the gospel; to which the spirit of Elias, tho he was a very good man in his time, would be altogether unsuitable. God permitted it then, under that imperfect way of religion; but now under the gospel it would be intolerable, &c. Archbp. Tillotson on Luke ix. 55, 56. Vol. i. 159.



SERM. tery of David, and the denial of St. Peter

IV. are left on record; why should a fierce, passionate and vindictive spirit pass without notice in Elijah, if this indeed can be supposed to have influenced his conduct? Since then the historian is silent about this matter, we should take care, that we do not rashly charge the prophet with a vindictive, exterminating spirit. But it will be urged, that tho the historian says not, that he was moved by a sour, vindictive spirit; yet this is abundantly plain from that rebuke Christ gave to two of his disciples, who were for calling down fire upon the Samaritans, even as Elias did: but he was so far from approving their zeal, that he rebuked them saying, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.* For if it was an argument of a bad temper in them, who would have called down fire upon the Samaritans; was it not evil in the prophet, who actually did call down fire upon the messengers of his king? In answer to this, I acknowledge, it is most probable, that the disciples would have done this in imitation of Elijah; and this, I suppose, has led those eminent writers to judge so unfavorably of his conduct. But our blessed Lord does not say, that Elijah was actuated by the same spirit, which he reprov'd in his disciples; and therefore what he says to them, cannot be fairly alleged against the prophet. He might approve his temper, tho he censured that of his disciples.

ples. Nothing is more certain than that SERM.  
actions differ very much according to the IV.  
principles from which they procede, or the  
circumstances which attend them. A prophet may righteously denounce those judgments, which it would be sinful for any other man to wish from a spirit of revenge. Elijah therefore might not act amiss, tho the disciples would have rashly followed his example. It cannot be infered from the reprimand Christ gave them, that he was passionate and vindictive; unless it can be proved that he acted from the same spirit, which influenced them; and knew no more, that God intended to destroy the servants of Ahaziah, than they knew, that he designed to destroy the Samaritans. If they, who impute to the prophet a vindictive and exterminating spirit, cannot prove the cases to be parallel in these and other respects; they must give me leave to conclude, that they pass a very wrong judgment upon one of the greatest men, who ever appeared in the world.

But if some christian writers charge the prophet with a vindictive and exterminating spirit, it is no wonder, if unbelievers take the advantage, which is given them; and improve their misrepresentation of this history against revelation itself, as well as against the prophet. Unbelievers imploy various arts to undermine the authority of the Bible, and where their denying it wholly  
would

SERM. would not be well taken, they pick out

IV.  some difficult places, and artfully dress them up in such false colors, as deceive those, who have not well studied the scriptures, nor sufficiently considered the true grounds of divine revelation. For such men, not perceiving what answer to make, give up one place after another, till in the end they give up all. And in the instance before us, the enemies of the Bible may seem to have a large field for declamation. They can easily think of many things to move compassion towards the sufferers, and to set the action of the prophet in such a light, as will impose upon them, who have not duly considered the history. Was it not, they will say, a most cruel thing to destroy two whole companies of soldiers by such a miserable death? Did it become the holy man to take such a severe revenge upon his enemies? Or can it be in good earnest supposed, that almighty God would humor the incensed prophet, and execute such terrible vengeance upon them in answer to his prayer? Can it be thought that he is so weak a being as to gratify the passionate imprecations of a prophet? By such questions it is insinuated, that the prophet acted from an unmerciful spirit; and consequently, that the scriptures are unworthy of God, because they represent him answering an angry and revengeful prayer. But declamation apart:

I

can



can they prove by just remarks on the original text, that the prophet is there introduced praying God to destroy these men from his own resentment and passion; and that God is represented cutting them off by fire from heaven in answer to his prayer, when he had otherwise no intention to cut them off? They cannot; but take these two things for granted, which will appear to be absolutely false. In order therefore to answer the objections of unbelievers, and to rectify the gross mistakes of them, who assent to the truth of divine revelation, I shall endeavour to set this history in a true light. For this end, I shall not state what right the Creator has over offending creatures, nor consider the true ends of such judgments, as were inflicted upon wicked people before, and under the law of Moses. To vindicate the honor of the prophet, and to maintain the authority of the Bible as far as relates to this case, it will be sufficient to shew,

I. THAT the wickedness of Ahaziah and his people was extremely great, and called for some remarkable punishment.

II. THAT God determined to destroy the men, who were sent against the prophet, not only to secure his life, but also for other wise and good ends.

III. THAT

SERM.

IV.

III. THAT the prophet knowing it was the will of God to cut off these men in this awakening manner, foretold and denounced it to them, that these ends might be accomplished.

I AM to shew,

I. THAT the wickedness of Ahaziah and his people was extremely great, and called for some remarkable punishment.

HE was not moved by any former warnings of the prophet, nor brought to consideration by the untimely death of his father; but followed his pernicious example, still seducing the people, and provoking God by his abominable idolatries. *He did evil in the sight of the Lord, says the historian, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. For he served Baal, and worshipped him, and provoked to anger the Lord God of Israel, according to all that his father had done, 1 Kings xxii. 52, 53.* The author of the book of Chronicles informs us, that he did very wickedly, and so provoking was his impiety, that God had abandoned him; and would not prosper the naval expedition of Jehoshaphat, because he joined the fleet of this vitious prince, which might tend to infect his own subjects with the idolatry

latry of the Israelites. And therefore the SERM.  
prophet declared to him, *Because thou hast* IV.  
*joined thyself with Abaziah, the Lord hath*  
*broken thy works,* 2 Chron. xx. 37. The  
wickedness of Ahaziah, so great in it-  
self, was highly aggravated by his making  
the people to sin. By his evil example and  
authority he corrupted their worship and  
manners, and justly drew upon himself the  
guilt of their transgressions. And if we con-  
sider how many kings, who made Israel to  
sin, reigned before Ahab; how long he  
reigned himself, and exceded them all in  
wickedness; that Ahaziah followed the steps  
of his ungodly progenitors; we have reason  
to conclude the people were generally cor-  
rupted in his time. In the reign of Ahab  
there were but seven thousand, who had  
not bowed the knee to Baal, which was  
a very small number in comparision of the  
whole nation; and none of this little rem-  
nant, we may suppose, were to be found  
either in the court or among the guards of  
his dissolute successor. Thus both prince  
and people had departed from the worship  
of the living and true God, and defiled  
themselves with the abominable idolatries  
of the heathen. And idolatry is certainly  
a very great sin, by whomsoever committed.  
For as there is but one God, who created  
all things visible and invisible; all men are  
obliged to acknowledge his being and go-  
vernment, their dependence upon him by  
H prayer



SERM. prayer and thanksgivings; to love and fear  
IV. him, and to live in obedience to his laws.

— To forget their bountiful Creator, and alienate their affections from him; to give his honor and worship to deceased men, who were subject to the same infirmities with themselves, or to any other beings of inferior rank, was a moral evil of great and complicated guilt. This could not but corrupt their manners, and lead them into other enormous crimes, as St. Paul has observed, Rom. i. And it might be largely proved out of heathen writers, that the worship of false Gods was mixed with much lewdness; and their worshipers encouraged in the commission of adultery, and other great vices by their example. Now idolatry, which was so great a sin in other nations, was abundantly greater in the Jews. God had manifested himself to them in a singular manner, and given them a written institution; he promised them his blessing, while they obeyed his laws, and warned them of those punishments he would inflict upon them, if they gave into idolatry. They therefore were under greater obligations to serve him, and might more easily keep themselves from idolatry. For these reasons, their revolting from him, and meanly bowing down to the idols of the neighbouring nations was a most heinous crime, and defiled the land with other great immoralities. Having cast off the fear of the  
true

true God, they were under no restraints; SERM.  
but fell in with the licentious manners, as IV.  
well as with the impure rites of the hea-  
then. For these sins they were often abandoned into the hands of their enemies, and as often delivered upon their repentance. And besides these awakening dispensations, which might convince them, that the God of their fathers was the only true God, and engage them to be more stedfast in his worship; he sent several prophets, and among them Elijah, to warn them of his judgments, that they might prevent them by a timely reformation. Ahaziah and his people could not but know, what judgments this prophet had denounced against his family for their wicked idolatries. How great then must their guilt be, who would take no warnings, but still persisted in their evil customs? The king himself was certainly a most stupid and incorrigible sinner. For when he fell down from a lattice in his upper chamber, and was sick; he did not repent of his sins, and turn to God; but sent to inquire of Baalzebub the idol of the Ekronites. This fresh instance of his impiety so offended the true God, that he decreed he should not recover of his sickness, and sent Elijah to foretel his death to the messengers. This message from the God of Israel was so far from touching his obdurate heart with any remorse, that he formed a wicked resolution to murder the prophet.

SERM. There is no room, in my opinion, to doubt  
 IV. that he designed to take away his life. His  
 family bore such implacable hatred to this  
 holy man for reproving their wickedness,  
 and declaring the judgments of God against  
 them; his mother Jezebel had so long de-  
 termined to cut him off, 1 Kings xix. 2.  
 and the king himself appears to have been  
 so obstinate in his sins, that we cannot rea-  
 sonably conceive he sent for him with any  
 other view. The manner of sending for  
 him plainly indicates his true design. If he  
 desired only to know the event of his dis-  
 ease, why did he not send other messengers  
 to him, as well as to the idol of the Ekro-  
 nites? How came he to send a company of  
 soldiers to fetch him, if he had no design  
 upon his life? Is it not evident from hence,  
 that he intended to put him to death, just  
 as the king of Syria sent for Elisha after the  
 same manner, when he thirsted after his  
 blood? 2 Kings vi. 13. The captains in-  
 deed commanded him in the name of the  
 king to come down, but this was done in  
 a haughty manner; because they thought  
 he could not possibly escape, but must sur-  
 render himself into their hands; and had  
 he refused to go with them, no doubt they  
 would have compelled him by force. Jose-  
 phus<sup>a</sup> therefore represents the captain threat-  
 ening to fetch him down by force, if he  
 would

<sup>a</sup> Joseph. Antiq. Jud. Lib. ix. cap. 2. p. 395. Ed. Hudson.



would not come at his command. So ob-  
durately wicked was the king, even in his  
sickness; and we may justly presume they  
were not much better, who were detached  
upon this evil attempt. For either they  
were such, as were corrupted by the idola-  
tries and vices of the court; or such, as se-  
cretly believed in the true God. They,  
who censure the prophet, may suppose  
which of the two they please. If they  
were tainted with the idolatries and vices of  
the court, their sin was exceeding great, as  
has been already proved; and must have  
received no small aggravations from their  
ingaging in this wicked attempt. Even  
they could not but know that Elijah was  
innocent, and as a prophet, did not deserve  
death for predicting what would be the issue  
of their master's sickness. If on the other  
hand they secretly believed in the true God,  
which yet cannot be reasonably supposed,  
it was a greater crime in them to go against  
the prophet; and for so meanly executing  
the prince's orders in despite of their own  
consciences, and acting against the prophet  
of that God, in whom they believed, they  
justly deserved this punishment. But whe-  
ther they were the one, or the other; tho'  
the command of the king made him prin-  
cipal in this wicked design, yet it could not  
clear them of all guilt; and supposing them  
to have been idolaters, we may conclude  
they went upon this expedition against the

SERM.

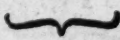
IV.

SERM. prophet with pleasure. And if they, who

IV. first went upon this design, were highly culpable, what daring sinners must they be, who made the second attempt; who would not take warning, but feared their king more than God, tho such signal vengeance had overtaken the other? So great was the impiety of the king and people, so unjust the attempt against the prophet! And therefore,

II. GOD determined to destroy the men, who were sent against the prophet, not only to secure his life, but also for other wise and good ends of his government.

THAT it was the will of God to destroy these men may be infered from the presence of the angel, who guarded the prophet at this time; and had this one circumstance alone been duly attended to, it would have prevented those rash judgments, which have been made of his conduct. This moreover is evident from the nature of the evil inflicted, for he alone could destroy them in this manner. It was not in the power of Elijah to cut them off in this dreadful way. Tho he had been ever so much enraged against them, he could not bring down these devouring flames upon their heads. Every one knows, that such a death is above the power of any mortal to inflict. And as the prophet could not thus destroy them himself, so it would not have been done

done by the divine power, if he had wished SERM.  
it in anger. For the power of God was IV.  
not exerted, when the prophets pleased,   
whether agreeable to his will or not. He  
would not hear the prayers of the most  
eminent prophets, if they desired what was  
not fitting for him to grant, as might be  
shewn by several instances. Can it be ra-  
tionally supposed, that the Samaritans would  
have been consumed by fire from heaven, if  
St. John and St. James had ever so ardently  
called it down upon them? No, we must  
not imagine so absurd a thing, as that the  
power of God was subject to the will of  
men; and the answer our blessed Lord  
gave his disciples most evidently shews, that  
such a petition would have been rejected  
with abhorrence. Nor could it be done  
by any other power than that of God, or  
the angel of God, who attended Elijah;  
because he declared, that he was a prophet  
of the true God, and appealed to this event  
for the truth of his mission. *If I be a man  
of God, says he, let fire come down from  
heaven and consume thee and thy fifty.* You  
call me a man of God in derision; but if  
he be the true God, whom I worship, and  
I am really his prophet, fire will come down  
from heaven and consume thee and thy  
company. He affirmed therefore, that God  
would in this manner destroy them; which  
had it been false, undoubtedly the Almighty  
would not have suffered it to come to



SERM. pass: from whence I think it clearly fol-

IV. lows, that it was his will to make an example of these men for a warning to the whole nation. But it may perhaps be asked, Why were these men singled out to suffer divine vengeance, since the whole nation was so much corrupted? Now little regard is due to such questions, because they, who ask them, seem resolved not to receive satisfaction. If any other men had suffered, would they not ask the same question? But nothing is more easy than to give such an account of this matter, as may satisfy any reasonable man. For where many deserve death, a wise and merciful government will appoint them to suffer, who are most guilty, and whose execution will best answer the ends of punishment. These men therefore suffered in the case before us, because there was not the same reason, why others should suffer; nor could the death of any others so well answer the wise ends of the supreme ruler of the world; as will fully appear from a view of those ends, for which this judgment was inflicted.

FOR if we consider it as done for the punishment of evil doers, who were so fit to be made examples, as they, who were not only involved in the common guilt, but were also actually engaged in this wicked undertaking? And considering it in this view, there is no room for any reasonable objection. As wise and good rulers punish bad

bad subjects with death to prevent their doing further mischief, and to secure the innocent; so might the supreme ruler and judge strike these men with death to stop the execution of their evil design. SERM.  
IV.

THIS was also done for the security of a righteous man, whose life was in the utmost peril. There was no other means of his escaping their hands. It would have been in vain to fly, when beset with a whole company of soldiers; and if he surrendered himself, he lay at the mercy of Ahaziah. In this distress God seasonably interposed, and, by destroying these wicked agents, saved the prophet's life, and preserved him for future usefulness. This end was plainly accomplished. For the third captain came with another view, and spake in a different manner, as appears from the thirteenth verse. *And then the angel of the Lord said unto Elijah, Go down with him, be not afraid of him,* ver. 15. which manifestly implies, there was danger in going before; but the king was so impressed and softened by the destruction of the second company, that he would not dare to put him to death.

FURTHER, this was designed to confirm the mission of Elijah; and to vindicate the honor of God. The prophet was sent to admonish the people, and to reclaim them from idolatry and other iniquities; but they were so far from minding his reproofs and exhortations, that they hardened themselves in

SERM. in their wickedness. This wonderful event

IV. therefore was intended to establish his authority, and to make his admonitions and denunciations more regarded. For the fire coming down from heaven, upon his denouncing it, manifestly proved, that he was the true God, in whose name Elijah prophesied, and whose worship they had most wickedly forsaken.

THIS dreadful execution was also graciously designed to awaken the people to a serious consideration of their state, and it was certainly their own fault, if it had not a good effect. When Elijah before this proposed a fair trial to decide, whether the God of Israel, or whether Baal was the true God; and no fire came down to consume the sacrifice of the priests of Baal, notwithstanding all their long and vehement cries: but upon his prayer, *The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water, which was in the trench; when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God,* 1 Kings xviii. 38, 39. And since they were convinced by this, surely the miraculous destruction of these men sent against the prophet was sufficient to rouse them out of their stupidity, and to renew the good impression then made, which seems to have been soon worn off and obliterated. As these men



men were the king's servants, it might more SERM.  
sensibly convince him of his wickedness in IV.  
seducing the people, and the people of their  
sin in following his example. Had as great  
a number of idolaters been destroyed in another place, it could not have produced so good effects; but their being struck dead in their attempt upon the life of Elijah was proper to convince both king and subjects, that he was the prophet of the true God; that they did wickedly in worshiping idols, and that all the judgments denounced by him would as certainly come upon them, unless they repented. These few therefore were not only taken away to secure the prophet; but also to reclaim the people from their idolatry, and to prevent the ruin of the whole nation. In vain will it be to object, that none, but they who perished, heard the denunciation of Elijah, and that others therefore could not be convinced by it; since the circumstances made it as plain to all, that it was done in defence of the prophet, and by the power of his God; as if they had in person heard his voice, and beheld the descending flames. Other persons, who happened to be near, might see the event, and relate it to the court. It might be known by other ways, which cannot be accounted for at present. However it sufficiently appears from the words of the third captain, that some way or other it was known at court.

SERM. FOR these wise, just and good ends were

IV. these men so terribly destroyed; and evident  
it is, that they were in some measure answered. But tho a suitable effect had not followed, this would be no argument against the fitness of the execution, but of the incorrigible wickedness of the people. Should it be asked, Why so many perished, and that in a manner so terrible? I answer, neither the number of them who suffered, nor the severity of the punishment is to be considered in itself; but in relation to the crimes committed, and to the wise ends of the divine government. All wise rulers proportion their executions, both in number and severity, to the state of the times, and the quality of the offence, so as that they may have the best effect. And when the great and general wickedness of the people in the time of Elijah is duly weighed, the number of them, who suffered, will appear very small. When almost a whole nation deserved to be cut off for heinous and long continued abominations, who can justly complain, that one hundred of them perished in this impious attempt? Why are we not so fair as to consider how many were spared? But why were they not restrained by the divine power, as others have been, rather than taken off by such a severe and sudden stroke? And may it not be as reasonably asked, when rebels and wilful murderers are put to death, why they were not only confined to prevent their  
doing

doing further mischief? And to this every S E R M.  
one will very properly answer, that they de- IV.  
served death, and there were good reasons

for their execution. And is it not as good  
an answer in the case under consideration,  
that as the wickedness of the king and peo-  
ple called for some remarkable and awaken-  
ing chastisement; so these men deserved to  
die, and there were wise and good reasons  
for their punishment? I would not willingly  
omit any one circumstance, which carries  
the least appearance of difficulty, and may  
seem to require an answer. If therefore it  
should be further inquired, Why this severe  
judgment was twice inflicted? the reason is  
plain, because the prince was so wicked, his  
servants so daring, as to make a second at-  
tempt. But hardened as they were, when  
the same judgment came upon the second  
captain and his fifty, they were forced to  
acknowledge the hand of God. This is  
evident from the words of the third captain,  
who *came, and fell on his knees before Eli-  
jah, and besought him, and said unto him,  
O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and  
the life of these fifty thy servants be precious  
in thy sight. Behold there came fire down  
from heaven, and burnt up the two captains  
of the former fifties with their fifties: there-  
fore let my life now be precious in thy sight.*  
He speaks not in imperious, insulting lan-  
guage, like the two former captains; but in  
the stile of an humble suppliant, as one  
I who



SERM. who was really convinced, that Elijah was a

IV. true prophet of God. The second execution therefore was necessary to effect the wise and good ends, for which the first was designed. I observe,

III. THAT the prophet knowing it was the will of God to cut off these men in this awakening manner, foretold and denounced it to them, that these ends might be accomplished.

HE would not have spoken these words, if he had not been sure of the event; for if it had not come to pass, according to his denunciation, he would have been exposed to greater contempt and danger. Besides, the same thing happened again upon his repeating the same words, which shews that he did not boldly conjecture, but certainly foreknow, what the event would be; that he prayed not for their destruction without knowing whether God would hear him, but denounced what he was certain God would accomplish. Let us here consider how other prophets acted, when they were exposed to sufferings in the exercise of their office. They did not beseech God to destroy those men, who came to apprehend them; but patiently bore reproaches, imprisonment and death. And is there then any ground to imagine, that Elijah would imprecate so much evil upon his enemies in a passion, if he knew not what God intended

tended to do? Is it not more reasonable to S E R M.  
suppose, that if he could not make his escape IV.

by flight, he would have suffered himself to be taken; and would have endured whatever was inflicted upon him, with as calm and firm resolution, with as much patience and submission to the will of God, as any other of the prophets? From hence we may conclude, that he knew how God would destroy his adversaries, and accordingly denounced it; for otherwise he would have resigned himself into their hands, and glorified God by his sufferings. And as he would not have been so rash and imprudent, as to pronounce such words in the hearing of his enemies, if he had not been certain of the event; so he could only know it by the spirit of prophecy, or by the ministry of that angel, who attended him. Of himself he could no more foresee, that this judgment would overtake them, than he could inflict it by his own power. The prophet therefore knowing how the Almighty would destroy them, foretold and denounced it in his name. *If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty.* Thus our translation reads it, but it may be rendered from the Hebrew<sup>a</sup>, *Fire will come down from heaven.* This is more plain, and is agreeable to the Greek version, which has, *Fire will descend from heaven*<sup>b</sup>. And had this rendering been observed by our translators

<sup>a</sup> וְאִם אִנִּי אִישׁ אֵלֹהִים

<sup>b</sup> Καταβήσεται πῦρ

SERM. translators in this and many other places,

IV. the words of Elijah would have been better understood<sup>a</sup>; and several passages in the Psalms, which now seem to be revengeful wishes and imprecations; would have plainly appeared to be, what they really are, prophetic denunciations and predictions. It was necessary he should speak these words for the conviction of those, who suffered; and that they should be consumed in his presence, that others might be awakened to repentance by their unhappy end. He did not therefore pronounce these words in anger, but from a spirit of prophecy; nor can it be properly said, that he cut off his enemies in his own defence, which was a thing intirely out of his power; nor did he pray for their destruction, as a thing desired by himself; but denounced as a prophet, what he knew God intended to inflict for wise and good reasons. What room is there then to suppose that he was moved by any undue passion? When other prophets foretold very dreadful calamities,

<sup>a</sup> Josephus says, that "Elias having told the captain, that to prove he was a true prophet, he would pray, that fire might come down from heaven and consume his soldiers and him likewise; he prayed, and instantly fire came down and consumed the captain and his soldiers." Antiq. Jud. Lib. ix. cap. 2. p. 395. If this was so, we must understand this to have been a prophetic prayer, and explain it, as his prayer, That it might not rain, has been explained in the first discourse. But it lies otherwise in the Bible; and as he says nothing of his praying in the other case, I suppose he might some way know that he prayed in one of the cases, and confounded them in his thoughts.



mities, which were to happen in future SERM.  
times, no man supposes they were actuated IV.  
by a vindictive, exterminating spirit; and  
yet there is plainly no difference between  
Elijah's action and theirs, but this alone,  
that his denunciation was to take place im-  
mediately, and theirs were not to be accom-  
plished till some time after. For he speaks  
in the same calm spirit of prophecy, as his  
words clearly manifest: *If I be a man of God,*  
*fire will come down from heaven.* Do they  
sound like an unmerciful prayer, or a prophe-  
tic denunciation? He speaks calmly and aw-  
fully as a minister of God, even as they  
who wrought miracles in the name of Je-  
sus. *In the name of Jesus of Nazareth,*  
said St. Peter to the lame man, *rise up and*  
*walk,* Acts iii. 6. Thus Elijah said, *If I*  
*be a man of God, fire will come down.* Com-  
pare this event with the untimely end of  
Ananias and Sapphira. Did St. Peter wish  
them to death, or only foretel how suddenly  
they should die? An ancient unbeliever in-  
deed blames his severity in striking them  
with death; but every one may easily per-  
ceive this to be a weak and groundless charge,  
for he had not power to strike them dead;  
and therefore could only declare by inspira-  
tion of the holy Ghost, what was justly  
coming upon them from the hand of God,  
to deter others from the like iniquity.  
Thus, I presume, I have given a true ac-  
count

SERM. count of this history, by shewing that Eli-

IV. jah did not pray God to send down fire from heaven upon his enemies, but only prophetically denounce, what he knew God intended to do; that this dreadful end came upon these men not only to secure the prophet's life, but also to awaken the people to repentance, at a time, when the wickedness of the king and people was so great, that God might have justly sent some dreadful judgment upon the whole land. From hence it appears,

I. THAT the conduct of Elijah in this affair has been much mistaken, and ill defended by many christian writers, as well as unjustly censured by unbelievers. We must not judge of Elijah by the rebuke, which Christ gave to his two disciples. The circumstances, in which he was placed, were very different from their case. He was in danger of his life, but they were only denied a passage through a village of Samaria. No less different from the spirit which influenced them was that, from which Elijah acted. He denounced the surprising death of these men from a spirit of prophecy, but the disciples were moved by their own resentment, heightened perhaps by that enmity, which was between the Jews and the Samaritans. He knew that the angel of God would strike these men with death for those great ends, which have been already explained; but

but they had no notice that God would for SERM.  
any such ends send down fire upon the in- IV.  
habitants of that village. Tho they there-  
fore deserved blame for their intemperate  
heat, he did nothing unbecoming a mild  
and good man. It became him as a pro-  
phet to denounce the judgment of God;  
but it was evil in them to wish the same  
judgment to any from a spirit of revenge;  
which was not only contrary to their ma-  
ster's design, but even to the principles of  
natural religion. But tho these things are  
so very plain, yet several excellent authors  
have represented the spirit of Elijah as un-  
suitable to the gracious dispensation of the  
gospel, but comporting very well with that  
of the law; as if they judged it to be the  
same, which influenced the sons of Ze-  
bedee; and imagined, that he brought  
down that severe judgment by his own  
prayer, even when God would not have  
sent it, if he had not prayed. But certain  
it is, they very widely mistake the case;  
and do great injustice to the character of  
Elijah by conceiving that he was guided  
by such a spirit, as is unsuitable to the go-  
spel of peace: and judge too favorably of  
the disciples in thinking they were actuated  
by any spirit, which was justifiable under  
the law. We are not to judge of the con-  
duct of Elijah, and the disciples by that dis-  
pensation, under which they lived; or by



SERM. the judgment itself, which he denounced,  
 IV. and they would have called down; but by

the spirit, which actuated them, which I have shewn to be very different. To wish such a dreadful end to an enemy from private resentment, would have been evil under the law; to denounce it prophetically, as Elijah did, is no way unsuitable to the meekness of the gospel. For did not the merciful Jesus, who came not to destroy, but to save the lives of men, foretel those terrible calamities, which were to come upon the Jews for their incorrigible wickedness? Did not St. Peter denounce the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira? We may therefore justly wonder, that the action of Elijah has been so strangely mistaken, and the true sense of our blessed Saviour's rebuke so unaccountably perverted. When he says, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*, the true meaning is manifestly this. You are greatly mistaken, if you suppose you are influenced by the same spirit, which directed Elijah. He was moved by a spirit of prophecy, but you speak from a hasty resentment, and inconsiderate zeal. He was sent to denounce the judgments of God against a wicked people, but you are called to preach the gospel of peace; and tho such a judgment was necessary at that time, it is not agreeable to your function; for the conversion of sinners is not to be effected

effected in the same way, as irreclamable S E R M.  
offenders were then destroyed. IV.

2. IF we consider this judgment as an act of God, there is nothing in it unworthy of his perfections; and consequently there is no reason to doubt but the narration is true. That it was an instance of his power, will not be contested; for it was what no man could inflict, nor any superior being do without his permission. His holiness and justice are conspicuously seen, because this sad end came upon them for their enormous crimes. And tho he might have justly punished others also for their idolatry; yet these most deserved to be made examples of his justice, because they were engaged in a wicked attempt upon the life of his prophet. It could not be inconsistent with his goodness and clemency, because he had exercised much forbearance towards the nation; the evil was light in comparison of what it had deserved, and the death of these few was designed for the reformation of all the people. His wisdom herein eminently appeared, inasmuch as by this means the prophet's life was secured, and it was well adapted to the state of the kingdom, which called for some awakening dispensation. And since the supreme Being might inflict this judgment, consistently with his perfect justice, goodness and wisdom, upon them, who are said to have suffered it,

SERM. what reason can there be to doubt, that it

IV. was really inflicted?

3. WE should not hastily censure the actions of pious men, nor arraign the conduct of providence related in the scriptures. When we confusedly represent to ourselves two companies of soldiers cut off by devouring flames, at the prayer of the prophet, being surprized at so dreadful an execution, we know not how to reconcile this prayer to the character of a merciful and good man, nor the event itself to the perfections of the Deity. But when we more closely examine the whole history, and perceive that the death of these men was a judicial act of the supreme governor of the world, punishing some of his rebellious subjects for wise and good ends; that Elijah did not from an unmerciful spirit pray for, but with prophetic calmness denounce the destruction of his enemies: when we coolly reflect upon the great abominations of the prince, and crying iniquities of the people; what an inconsiderable handful perished, when the number of transgressors was so exceedingly great, all perplexing thoughts vanish. We clearly discern, that the proceeding of God was righteous, and the conduct of his prophet unblameable. We behold with pleasure the Almighty keeping a watchful eye upon his creatures, and as he sometimes prevents the execution of their



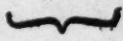
evil designs by imperceptible means; so interposing in this juncture by a visible hand, when the good government of the world required it. SERM.  
IV.

4. WE should take care how we imitate the actions of holy men recorded in the scripture. For they did many things by virtue of those extraordinary powers they received of God, which we ought not to imitate, because we are not invested with the same powers. Some christians, it is to be feared, indulge a bitter zeal, and imprecate evil upon their enemies, sufficiently justified, as they imagine, by the example of Elijah, David, and other great men. But they should consider, that these holy men were prophets, who predicted and denounced those judgments, which they certainly knew God would send. And when they find themselves indowed with the same spirit of prophecy, they may also foretel and denounce as many evils as they are commissioned and directed to foretel and denounce; but in wishing, or doing evil to others from the heat of their resentment and zeal, they do what those holy prophets would not have done. They imitate the sons of thunder, whose too hot and hasty resentment was reproved by the merciful Jesus. Nay they act abundantly worse, for the disciples so far commanded their temper, as to consult their Lord;

SERM. while they wish evil to their enemies, tho

IV. they know how sharply Christ reprov'd an  
 { intemperate zeal, and vindictive spirit, when  
 an affront was offer'd to himself; and how  
 contrary these things are to the genius  
 of christianity, which forbids all manner  
 of revenge, and obliges us to do good  
 even to our enemies. We are to be fol-  
 lowers of them, who through faith and  
 patience inherit the promises; but then we  
 should imitate their holy conversation, their  
 stedfast faith, and patient suffering, not  
 what they did in quality of prophets.  
 We shall act a ridiculous, nay, wicked  
 part; if we wish to others those evils in  
 revenge, which they predicted as pro-  
 phets.

5. GOD has never been wanting to his  
 faithful servants, but been with them in  
 all their distresses. When suffering would  
 answer the most valuable ends; would be  
 most for their good and for his glory, he  
 carried them through it with patience and  
 comfort. When deliverance was best on  
 all accounts, he either brought it about  
 by unseen methods, or by an outstretch-  
 ed arm. And tho now we have such clear  
 and distinct views of an eternal recom-  
 pence to support us in all our trials, he  
 does not interpose in our behalf in that  
 extraordinary manner, in which he ap-  
 peared for Elijah, Daniel and others; yet  
 we

we may be assured, that he will either **SERM.**  
by his kind overruling providence keep us **IV.**  
from evil; or suffer no evil to befall us,   
but what shall do us good, and prepare  
us for a better world, if we faithfully serve  
him, to whom be honor, glory, &c.



**SERMON**





## S E R M O N V.

6

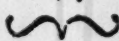
The reasons why Christians should  
always rejoice.

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I T H E S S. V. 16.

*Rejoice evermore.*

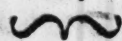
SERM.  
V.



WE are at present subject to so many frailties, and surrounded with so many evils, that complete happiness, such as we naturally thirst after, is not to be expected in this life, but is reserved for the future world. The greatest happiness we can here attain, is to enjoy the good things, which God gives us, with innocent pleasure; and to bear up under all the evils of life with a contented, cheerful spirit. This cheerful temper in all circumstances, prosperous or adverse, is what our holy religion enjoins; because it gives us sufficient reasons to raise and support it within us. The apostle in the text exhorts the Thessalonians to *rejoice evermore*, tho it is certain from other places of this epistle, that they

they suffered persecution for their holy profession. The same exhortation he gives to the Philippians, ch. iv. 4. *Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice;* which is a repetition of that advice, he had given them in the first verse of the third chapter, *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.* For this place also, in my opinion, is to be understood of that cheerful frame of spirit, which christians should endeavour to maintain in every circumstance of life. It is true, the original word occurring in these places was commonly used in salutations, when persons met with, or took leave of their friends. But omitting instances of this kind, I shall give one, where it occurs in the beginning; and another, where it is used in the conclusion of an epistle. The former you have in the decretory letter of the council at Jerusalem, Acts xv. 23. *The apostles, and elders, and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia:* the latter you will find in St. Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians, ch. xiii. 11. *Finally, brethren, farewell.* In these salutations it is an earnest wish, that they might always be so happy, as to have cause to rejoice; which, I apprehend, cannot be the use of this word in the third chapter of the epistle to the Philippians. Can we reasonably suppose he was going to conclude his epistle, before he had cautioned them against the Judaizers;

SERM. Judaizers; which seems to have been one

V.  great design of his writing, and is the subject of the following verses? Besides, he repeats these words in the fourth chapter, where he is not concluding his epistle, and seems to refer to these words; which manifestly shews, that they are to be considered as an exhortation to continual cheerfulness, and not as a valedictory wish. In our text however he is not taking his leave of the Thessalonians, but is giving them several directions and precepts; and therefore must be supposed to speak of that religious joy, which every christian should always preserve in himself. In many other places we are exhorted to this rejoicing, which I shall not lay before you at present; choosing to take them in other places, where they will aptly occur, in the series of this discourse, in which I propose to shew,

I. WHEREIN this rejoicing consists.

II. WHAT cause christians have to rejoice always upon the principles of christianity.

III. BY what means this happy temper may be attained.

IV. WHAT considerations should induce us to acquire and preserve it.



*should always rejoice.*

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I AM to explain,

SERM.

V.

I. WHEREIN this rejoicing consists.

JOY is one of our natural passions, and consists in a delightful sense of some good, which we at present injoy, or certainly expect; as sorrow, the contrary passion, is an uneasiness of mind occasioned by the sense of some evil which we suffer, or with which we have been afflicted. This passion is good or evil, according to the cause by which it is excited. It is good, when we rejoice in that which is innocent and virtuous; and evil, when we take delight in those things, which are mischievous and sinful. When it is directed by the command of God, and is under the regulation of religious principles, it becomes a virtue, and is what the apostle exhorts us to in the text. This rejoicing therefore may be defined, A constant cheerfulness of spirit, arising from a just sense of those many blessings we injoy as christians. I call it cheerfulness, because this word may seem better than any other to express, what the apostle intends; for joy admits of several degrees, according to the different occasions, by which it is excited. When we are delivered from any evil beyond our hopes, or meet with some unexpected good, this gives a more than ordinary briskness to our spirits, and dilates the heart with more lively sentiments of joy. Our Lord tells us, *That likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,*  
*more*

SERM. *more than over ninety and nine just persons,*

V. *which need no repentance, Luke xv. 7. Where*  
 by repentance we are to understand a change

from a wicked to a good life; and tho there is no doubt but the blessed spirits in heaven have great delight in righteous men, yet we may reasonably suppose, that their joy upon the repentance of a sinner is more elated for the present. In another place he represents a man rejoicing more upon his finding one lost sheep, *than of the ninety and nine, which went not astray, Matt. xviii. 13.* In such cases the joy of men will naturally rise higher than usual; and a christian likewise may meet with many occasions, which will cause him to exult in the Lord, and raise his joy to the highest pitch; tho it cannot be thought, that it should be thus elevated at all times, and therefore it is not required of him as a duty. But tho he cannot be always transported with the highest degrees of it, yet he may ever maintain an even, cheerful frame of spirit, which is therefore commanded in the text.

THIS cheerful disposition should spring from a just sense of those blessings, which are communicated to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many rejoice in those things, which are no just matter of joy, and which should rather fill them with sorrow. They delight in their sinful pleasures, and the success of their wicked actions; for which they ought to be sorry and repent. The taste of  
 others

others is so vitiated, that all their delight is, SERM.  
in the perishing things of this world. They V.  
are glad when their temporal affairs go on  
successfully, and they lay up abundance of  
riches; when their ambitious pursuits suc-  
cede, and they obtain those honors, after  
which they grasped. And christians indeed  
may rejoice in their temporal prosperity, and  
take all that pleasure in present things, which  
a sober use of them can give: but the chief  
cause of their gladness should be those more  
valuable and lasting blessings, which their  
holy religion affords. Phil. iv. 4. *Rejoice in  
the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.*  
We should not therefore rejoice so much on  
a temporal, as on a spiritual account; that  
we have the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and  
injoy the present blessings of his gospel; that  
we are happily delivered from a state of  
condemnation, and are made heirs of eter-  
nal life.

THE cheerfulness arising from hence  
should be our constant and settled temper.  
Tho we cannot be equally glad and cheerful  
at all times, yet this should be the prevail-  
ing habit of our minds in some degree or  
other. When great floods of affliction come  
suddenly upon a christian, they may trou-  
ble and discompose his mind at first; but  
it will soon grow clear and smooth again,  
when he comes seriously to reflect upon  
the many advantages he injoys, and the  
gracious ends of his afflictions. Some in-  
deed



SERM. deed are so overrun and depressed with natural melancholy, that they cannot be cheerfully disposed, even when they have the greatest cause for it; whose case deserves compassion more than blame. When this impediment is not in the way, the temper of a christian should be always serene and joyful. For the apostle exhorts us to *rejoice evermore*. But what, you will say, must we be glad in the saddest circumstances, and rejoice in those things, which are in themselves sorrowful and afflicting? How is it possible for beings, who are capable of sorrow, as well as of joy, to rejoice in a state of trouble and adversity, as well as in an easy and prosperous condition? In answer to this I say, that nothing is more certain, than that christians ought on some account or another to rejoice in the most afflicting scenes of life. Therefore our blessed Lord says to his disciples, Matt. v. 11. *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad.* The same exhortation St. James gives to all christians, ch. i. 2. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;* by which he means those persecutions and sufferings for religion, which were great trials of their faith and sincerity. Agreeable to this are the words of St. Peter, 1 Epist. iv. 12, 13. *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is*

*to try you, as though some strange thing hap-* SERM.  
*ned unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are* V.  
*partakers of Christ's sufferings.* And that no

more is here required of Christians, than they may be able to perform, is plain from those examples, which are recorded in scripture. When the apostles had been beaten by order of the Jewish council, *They departed from the presence of the council rejoicing, that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name,* Acts v. 41. When St. Paul suffered divers persecutions, he could say, *I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation,* 2 Cor. vii. 4. In another epistle he says, *Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh,* Col. i. 24. Nor is this too difficult for us, if it be rightly understood. Our holy religion does not require us to confound the notion and names of things; to call pain pleasure, and grief joy; but when we are grieved and afflicted in our outward circumstances, we should take comfort in those blessings, of which we are made partakers by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The disciples of our blessed Lord could not be glad, that they were ill used; nevertheless in this they could rejoice, that they were Christians, and were supported in all their sufferings by the spirit of God. Tho they could not be pleased, that men spoke evil of them falsely; yet amidst all the calumnies, which were un-

K

justly

SERM. justly cast upon them, they might take pleasure in their own integrity, and triumph in the approbation of almighty God. When they, and other believers were stript of their earthly substance, they could not delight in their losses simply considered; at the same time they could take *joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.* They exactly came up to the command of Christ, John xvi. 33. *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* Nay the more they were afflicted for his sake, the higher did their consolation and joy arise; because their patient suffering gave them greater evidences of their sincerity, and brighter views of their future glory. And why may not we live comfortably in every condition of life, not only when we enjoy our christian friends, but when they are taken from us; because *them, who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him*; when we suffer adversity, as well as when our affairs glide smoothly on; because we expect a neverfading inheritance above? We cannot indeed but be sensible of present evils, and affected with them; which yet should never so prevail over us, as to fill us with perpetual gloominess and sorrow. We should always preserve, or, if the suddenness and extremity of our afflictions causes any interruption, we should soon recover that cheerfulness,



fulness, which becomes our christian pro-  
fession and hopes. We should be more glad  
of the blessings we possess, than troubled  
for the evils we suffer; nor should we be  
so much cast down and depressed with the  
weight of our present afflictions, as lifted  
up and cheered with the hope of our eternal  
inheritance. That therefore, which is here  
required of us, is to rejoice that we are  
Christians; and in every state, tho afflicted,  
to preserve an even, cheerful temper in con-  
sideration of the many great blessings we  
here enjoy; and of those infinitely greater,  
which we hope hereafter to possess. And  
this duty we might think could have no  
exceptions made against it, and yet perhaps  
it is one of those, which are least of all ob-  
served: so much do men suffer the evils of  
this life to imploy their thoughts, and so  
little consider the many occasions they have  
to rejoice. I shall therefore procede to shew  
more particularly;

II. WHAT cause Christians have to rejoice  
always upon the principles of Christianity.  
And,

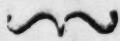
I. THEY may always rejoice in the  
knowledge of the truth, with which they  
are illuminated. The acquirement of know-  
ledge cannot but give great delight to an in-  
telligent being. Ignorance is uncomforta-  
ble, like darkness; while knowledge cheers  
the eye of the understanding, as light re-

SERM. freshes that of the body. Every new improvement in wisdom affords higher satisfaction, and the solution of a difficult problem, tho comparatively of little use, has given unspeakable pleasure to a speculative mind. But the more important any truths are, the greater pleasure must the discovery of them yield; especially when it is unexpectedly made, after many vain and fruitless inquiries. What concerned mankind more, than to know the true God, and the worship he will accept; the way in which he will be propitious to sinners, and what the state of men will be hereafter? These are things which relate not only to the present ease and comfort, but to the chief and eternal good of mankind. What just cause had Christians then to rejoice, when so many important truths were brought down from heaven and revealed to them at once, of which they had no expectation? How might the Gentiles exult with joy, when the true God was manifested to them, and his gracious purpose to forgive them upon repentance was declared, notwithstanding all their past idolatry and wickedness? How joyfully might they receive the christian doctrine of a future state and eternal blessedness, about which they had been perplexed with endless doubts and uncertainties before? The Jews had reason to be exceeding glad, when they found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets had written, and whom

whom they had long expected. By be-  
lieving they obtained a more clear and  
comfortable knowledge of the method, in  
which God would shew mercy to sinners;  
and of the world to come, than they had  
under the dispensation of the law. Very  
justly therefore is the gospel called *good ti-  
dings of great joy, which shall be to all people,*  
Luke ii. 10. Accordingly we find, that as  
the Jews had joy in believing; so likewise the  
Gentiles received the word with the highest  
satisfaction. Acts xiii. 48. *And when the  
Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glo-  
rified the word of the Lord.* The persecu-  
tion, which they suffered, could not abate  
the joy, which they received from the know-  
ledge of the truth. 1 Theff. i. 6. *And ye  
became followers of us, and of the Lord,  
having received the word in much affliction,  
with joy of the holy Ghost.* And tho we live  
so distant from those times, in which this  
cheering light dawned upon the world; yet  
we have reason to rejoice, that it has been  
propagated to our times. If we consider  
what darkness overspread the world, when  
it first arose; or survey the miserable state  
of those nations, where it shines not; we  
shall see cause to bless God, that we have  
been trained up in the knowledge of Christ  
from our childhood, and have always had  
this blessed light to guide us in the ways of  
truth, virtue and happiness. If we only con-  
sider the notion we have of the supreme Be-

SERM.

V.





SERM. ing, it may give us infinite delight. For

V. according to our holy religion he is not an arbitrary being, who delights in the misery of his creatures; and therefore we have no cause for those gloomy fears, with which wrong and superstitious notions overspread the mind. He is revealed to us in the gospel as a being of perfect goodness | as well as of infinite power | who knows all our wants, and is ready to hear our prayers; who will graciously forgive all true penitents, and accept of our sincere obedience, tho not without many imperfections, and reward it with eternal life. Such notions of God may always revive and support our spirits. How can we think of so amiable a being without delight?

2. CHRISTIANS have also just cause to rejoice in their reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. That all men are sinners against God, and that he may justly punish wilful offenders, is certain; for which reason the forgiveness of sins must be one principal ingredient in our true comfort and happiness. Tho God be ever so good in himself, what agreeable sense of his favor can we have, while we are enemies to him by wicked works? Nay if sin reigneth in us, it is impossible to have any true injoyment of ourselves. The consciousness of our guilt will afflict us with many gloomy fears of the most righteous Being, and make us very uneasy, whensoever we reflect upon our state.

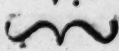
state. And tho we endeavour to suppress all S E R M.  
serious thoughts, and give ourselves up to V.  
carnal mirth; yet the sense of our guilt will  
frequently haunt us, interrupt our pleasure,  
and frighten us with sad presages of divine  
wrath. Men, who have long persisted in a  
vitious life, may hope indeed, that the infi-  
nitely good Being will forgive their sins; and  
yet their hope will be mixed with many  
fears and misgivings, like that of the Nine-  
vites. *Who can tell, if God will turn and  
repent, and turn away from his fierce anger,  
that we perish not?* Jonah iii. 9. The hope  
of forgiveness, which they conceive from  
the perfect goodness of God, may be dashed  
by the consideration of his infinite purity  
and justice, and of the number and aggra-  
vations of their crimes. A man, who has  
in many instances long offended a kind  
friend and benefactor, may hope he will  
be reconciled to him upon a sincere ac-  
knowledgment of his faults; but cannot be  
so certainly assured of it, as when he has  
declared to him, upon what terms he will  
forgive him. How joyfully then ought sin-  
ners to receive the gospel, which assures us  
that God has set forth his Son to be a pro-  
pitiation for sin, and will graciously pardon  
all them, who truly repent of their iniqui-  
ties? These express promises of forgiveness  
may dispel all doubts, and encourage every  
one to repentance by giving him the most  
certain hopes of acceptance with God. What

SERM. inexpressible joy may the sincere believer

V. have, who has truly repented of his sins, and obtained his pardon of God? How light, easy and cheerful may he be, when happily disburdened of all his guilt, the most insupportable load, by which he could be oppressed? Great surely is the pleasure which springs from the remission of sins, vastly greater than that of a malefactor, who receives a pardon under the sentence of condemnation. It is pure likewise without any mixture of sorrow, and fills the heart with perpetual serenity and gladness. The man, whose sins are forgiven, may enjoy himself in solitude, as well as in company; and may then have that sweet enjoyment of God, which company prevents. No outward accidents can deprive him of this inward peace, which will abide with him, and revive his spirits in the worst of circumstances. Whatsoever evils he suffers, he may rejoice in this, that he is delivered from sin the worst of all evils; and in the favor of God enjoys a greater good, than all the world besides can afford. And it may add to the pleasure of his life in good times, as well as support him in adversity, to consider, that *being justified by faith*, he has *peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*, Rom. v. 1.

3. ANOTHER constant spring of joy to a Christian is the practice of virtue according to the precepts of Jesus Christ. While all  
vicious



vitious inclinations and actions are blended SERM.  
with dissatisfaction, and followed with re- V.  
gret; all pious dispositions and practices are   
delightful in themselves, and attended with  
many comfortable and happy effects. And  
the more perfect those rules of virtue are,  
by which men govern themselves; the more  
pure those principles of action, by which  
they are influenced; the greater must their  
inward satisfaction be. But no rules are  
more perfect, no principles more pure, than  
those which our holy religion prescribes.  
Having through the spirit mortified the lusts  
of the flesh, and brought his passions in sub-  
jection to his religion, the Christian cannot  
but enjoy a happy calm in his own breast.  
When the passions are irregular, they ruffle  
the mind, disturbing it with many unnatu-  
ral and violent motions; but when they are  
reduced within just bounds, they lie quiet in  
the breast, and afford a great deal of plea-  
sure. A meek and humble spirit is infinite-  
ly more easy, than an angry and ambitious  
temper; and those affronts and provocations,  
which sit very hard upon the latter, give  
little or no disturbance to the former. The  
good Christian loves not this world, nor the  
things of this world inordinately; and his  
affections being chiefly placed on things a-  
bove, makes all present losses more easy to  
bear. He considers all present things as un-  
certain, and therefore is not so much sur-  
prised and afflicted at those changes, which  
happen

SERM. happen in his affairs. And if we could go  
 V. through all the duties of the christian life,  
 we should find that the practice of them  
 yields abundance of peace and satisfaction.  
 When the Christian devoutly prays to God,  
 the contemplation of the divine attributes,  
 and the making his requests known to him  
 by humble supplications, give him great de-  
 light, and ease his mind of many anxious  
 thoughts. His trust in God inspires him  
 with resolution and courage in all dangers;  
 and his submission to the divine will in all  
 events makes him more contented and cheer-  
 ful. If we observe his conduct towards other  
 men, as it is agreeable and pleasant to them,  
 so it is most delightful to himself. His jus-  
 tice in all his transactions, and his treating  
 every man according to that most equitable  
 rule, which our blessed Saviour has laid  
 down, *Whatsoever ye would that men should  
 do to you, do ye even so to them*, preserves him  
 from many perplexing circumstances, which  
 attend the ways of the unjust, and therefore  
 contributes very much to the ease and plea-  
 sure of his life. His sincere affection to his  
 friends makes him a partner in all their in-  
 joyments; and even when things go ill with  
 himself, he can rejoice in their prosperity.  
 His universal benevolence gives a vast scope to  
 his joy. He feels an inexpressible satisfaction  
 springing up in his own breast, when he  
 beholds others acting well, and prospering  
 in their affairs; and if he has promoted  
 their

their good by his advice or assistance, it SERM.  
gives a higher relish to his pleasure. It is V.  
true, he weeps with them who weep, as   
well as rejoices with them who rejoice; but  
the pain arising from his generous compas-  
sion is mingled with a certain sweetness un-  
known to the hardhearted; it is eased by  
his kind actions, and abundantly recompen-  
sed by pleasing reflexions on what he has  
done. Those acts of charity, by which  
the bowels of his distressed brethren are re-  
freshed, give a more exquisite pleasure to  
himself, than to those, who receive his  
bounty; by how much better it is to give,  
than to receive. He has also great delight  
in the exercise of those virtues, which relate  
more immediately to his own person. His  
strict observation of the rules of temperance,  
chastity, and humility give him more true  
pleasure, than others can enjoy in their sinful  
excesses. What pleasure soever they may  
have in gratifying a raging appetite, this soon  
ends in bitter remorse and various evils;  
while he has perpetual satisfaction in the  
religious government of his thoughts and  
actions. Besides all this and much more,  
which time will not permit me to say; the  
principles, from which he acts as a Christian,  
exceedingly heighten and improve the plea-  
sure he has in doing good. He is not led  
by mere natural disposition, nor by vain de-  
sires of applause; he is influenced by a sin-  
cere love to God, to virtue, and to mankind,  
which



SERM. which as it renders his actions more perfect,

V. so it increases his delight in doing them. He

~~~~~ has therefore great satisfaction in his good actions, and can always reflect upon his past life with much joy. Nothing in this world can so support a man at all times, as the consciousness of his having sincerely obeyed the will of God. This, we find, has ministered great comfort to pious men in all circumstances. 2 Cor. i. 12. *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-wards.*

4. A GOOD Christian has cause to be joyful at all times, because he is under the special providence of God. It is highly reasonable to suppose that God, who made the world, holds the reins of government in his own hands; and as he has an absolute dominion over all inanimate beings; so can likewise assist, prevent, and overrule the actions of all his rational creatures, as he sees good. In this belief they, who live righteously, may hope that all events, tho afflict- ing at first, will center in some wise and good end; but what mitigation of his trouble, what comfort can any man, even the most righteous, expect, if all things come to pass by mere chance, or are fixed by an inexorable fate. There is no room for any thing but sorrow, vexation, and despair, if there

there is not a wise and good ruler of the SERM.
world, who can either deliver us from evil, V.
or make it answer some good end. In a
state so full of various evils as this present
world, many of which none of us can
foresee or prevent, what can we wish for
our own comfort so much, as that the
whole world was governed by a being infi-
nitely good and powerful, who can sway
the hearts of men, and dispose of all events,
as he pleases? How comfortable then to all
pious men is the doctrine of the gospel,
which assures us, that God inspects the ac-
tions and affairs of all men; can frustrate
the bad purposes of the wicked, or make
their evil devices center in some good end,
tho not designed by them; and will so go-
vern all events, that if they promote not the
temporal good of his servants, they shall ad-
vance their eternal felicity? Tho God is good
to all, yet he takes particular care of righ-
teous men. For he *is the Saviour of all*
men, specially of those that believe, 1 Tim.
iv. 10. Our blessed Lord himself tells his
disciples, that the very hairs of their head
were all numbered, Matt. x. 30. By which
he signified to them, that God would take
care of all, even their minutest concerns;
and nothing should happen to them, but
what would be most for their good in the
conclusion. And to strengthen our faith,
and increase our comfort, we have several
instances of the special care, God has taken
of

SERM. of his servants in the scriptures. He has
 V. sometimes appeared to support them in their
 sufferings; as to Stephen, the first martyr of
 Christ; and sometimes interposed his power
 to deliver them; as when St. Peter was re-
 leased from prison, Acts xii. 7, 8. Not
 that we may expect such extraordinary in-
 terpositions in common cases; but as the
 miraculous operations of the spirit were de-
 signed to assure us of the certainty of that
 internal aid, which is promised to all Christi-
 ans, as well as to confirm the truth of the
 gospel; so these uncommon interpositions
 were designed to satisfy us, that there is a
 providence, which governs the whole world;
 and particularly interests itself in the true
 happiness of pious men. Having then these
 promises of divine protection; these exam-
 ples of the paternal care of God over his
 children, why should we be ever dejected?
 When storms of affliction are gathering over
 our heads, and men set themselves against
 us, we may say with the apostle, Rom. viii.
 31. *If God be for us, who can be against us?*
 In all afflictions this may comfort the good
 Christian, that God will either deliver him
 from them; or favor him with his presence;
 and make it better to him, than if he had
 lived in security and ease. If affliction brought
 nothing but evil along with it, we might
 abandon ourselves to grief; but we ought
 to bear it cheerfully, because, *We know that*
all things work together for good, to them who
love

love God, who are the called according to his S E R M.
purpose, Rom. viii. 28. There are several V.

advantages, which good men may receive from the evils of this life. They may exercise and improve those virtues, which make them useful, as faith, resignation, courage, and all others of a suffering state. Heb. xii.

11. *Now no chastning for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby.* And as their patient suffering manifests to themselves, as well as to others, the sincerity of their faith, love, and other virtues; so it must give them unspeakable satisfaction and delight. And having these effects they may also promote and increase their future blessedness. *For our light affliction, says St. Paul, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,* 2 Cor. iv. 17. And is not this matter of continual pleasure to a good man, that all his affairs are in the hands of that infinitely wise and good Being, who rules over all, and can deliver him from evil, if he sees best? In the most distressed circumstances of life may it not revive him to think, that almighty God is his friend and helper; and that all things, however grievous at present, will advance his comfort in this life, and add to his future glory, if he be upright and faithful?

SERM. 5. ANOTHER thing, which may give the

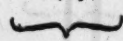
V. Christian joy in every state, is the promise of
 ~~~~~ divine assistance. There can be no reason  
 to doubt; but that the supreme intelligent  
 Being; who indowed men with the faculty  
 of thinking, can suggest things to their  
 thoughts, as well as impress motion upon in-  
 animate matter. And if we consider his love  
 to virtue, his concern for the happiness of  
 good men; can we reasonably suppose he  
 will not assist them in resisting temptation,  
 and performing their duty, especially when  
 either of them is attended with any particu-  
 lar difficulties? That he will do this, has  
 been the hope of good men in all ages; but  
 the express promises of the gospel give a  
 more certain and joyful expectation of it to  
 Christians. *If ye then, being evil, says our  
 blessed Lord, know how to give good gifts  
 unto your children: how much more shall your  
 heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them,  
 that ask him? Luke xi. 13.* But that God  
 will graciously assist good men; has been  
 lately proved in discoursing from another  
 place; and this matter explained from the  
 scriptures in a way so consistent with the li-  
 berty of our wills, and the nature of moral  
 virtue, as may prevent all presumption, at  
 the same time that it encourages our hope.  
 I am now only to consider it as a just cause  
 of rejoicing to sincere Christians. And it  
 may fill them with constant cheerfulness,  
 whether we consider them, as performing  
 their

their duty, or conflicting with present troubles. In the first case they may expect all that assistance, which is necessary for them, and have no cause to give way to slavish fears and despair; but may cheerfully persevere in doing good, because their endeavours will not be in vain. When men are engaged in a difficult undertaking, in which they know not whether they shall succeed, they cannot but be very much concerned and uneasy; but if they have good hopes of success, this will give life to all their actions. The Christian therefore has no cause to be uneasy, but may proceed with resolution and vigor; because he knows, that if he endeavours to work out his salvation, God will certainly attend him with his blessing. Whatever difficulties he meets with, he has no reason for any discouragement; *because greater is he that is in him, than he that is in the world.* With what alacrity and constancy may he resist temptation, and persevere in the practice of virtue, who can by his prayers obtain of God, whatsoever succours are necessary? And as this will inspire him with resolution and pleasure in the discharge of his duty; so it will likewise comfort him in all afflicting circumstances. For how trying and disconsolating soever these may be, yet in this he may rejoice, that God will strengthen him *with might by his Spirit in the inner man.* The expectation of this divine aid will prevent  
L many

SERM.  
V.



SERM. many doubts and fears, and will give him

V.  good reason to hope for a happy end of all his sufferings. The great joy, which the first Christians had in believing, is ascribed to the holy Ghost, Acts ix. 31. *Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the holy Ghost, were multiplied.* And we find St. Paul cheerfully bearing present evils, because he hoped for and relied upon the divine assistance, 2 Tim. iv. 18. *And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom; to whom be glory for ever. Amen.* The hope and injoyment of this aid filled other Christians with constant cheerfulness, and inabled them to rejoice in the greatest troubles. They expected all necessary assistance, and therefore feared no evils or difficulties; but gladly performed their duty, and faced all dangers with invincible fortitude and perpetual gladness. But,

6. A CHRISTIAN may be always glad in the prospect of that perfect rest and happiness, which he shall hereafter possess. Nothing can more effectually cheer persons under all the evils of this uncertain life, than the hope of a blessed immortality; and the greater assurance they have of being perfectly happy in the world to come, the higher will their joy arise. And herein the Christian has abundantly the advantage of all men, because

because Jesus Christ is in him *the hope of* SERM.  
*glory.* By rising from the dead, and ascend- V.  
ing into heaven, he has given us the most  
certain, the most lively expectation of a  
blessed resurrection from the grave to a state  
of endless felicity. How cheerful may the  
Christian be at all times, who knows, that  
in heaven he shall meet with nothing, which  
can any way afflict his body, or give the  
least disturbance to his mind; that he shall  
there possess every thing which can make  
him easy, and fill him with the highest  
pleasure and satisfaction? He will there be  
consummately happy in all respects, and  
from the expectation of this most blessed  
state he may derive great consolation in  
every circumstance of life. When he suf-  
fers want at present, he may comfort him-  
self with this consideration, that he shall be  
destitute of nothing hereafter, which is  
necessary to the completion of his happiness.  
When he meets with various losses and dis-  
appointments, he may rejoice, that he shall  
experience no vicissitudes, but be immutably  
happy in the future state. However he may  
be reviled and falsely accused here; he will  
be cleared by his great judge, and shine with  
immortal glory above. If in this world he  
has sorrow; this may be his comfort, that  
in a little time all his sighs will be turned  
into songs of praise, and all his grief swal-  
lowed up in perpetual rejoicing. His hope  
of heaven therefore may sweeten the bit-

SERM. tereft cup of affliction, and make it go  
 V. down with pleasure. When a man in  
 } great distress and trouble has certain hopes,  
 that he shall be delivered from it, and be  
 placed in a better condition in a short time;  
 this cannot but frequently come into his  
 thoughts, and give him a great deal of plea-  
 sure; and the more afflicted he is, the more  
 frequently will he think with comfort on his  
 approaching jubilee. How much more may  
 the Christian delight in the expectation of  
 his future rest, and not only fetch comfort  
 from thence in all present afflictions; but  
 even in the most prosperous state esteem it  
 his greatest happiness, that he is an heir of  
 eternal glory? This hope is proposed to us  
 as a just cause of rejoicing, Rom. xii. 12.  
*Rejoicing in hope.* To have a good right to  
 the heavenly glory is preferable to all other  
 attainments and advantages whatsoever. Luke  
 x. 20. *Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that  
 the spirits are subject unto you; but rather re-  
 joice, because your names are written in hea-  
 ven.* Our blessed Lord alludes to the custom  
 of inrolling the names of them, who are  
 made free of a city; and would not have his  
 disciples lifted up, because they had the gift  
 of working miracles, which in itself no way  
 qualified them for heaven; but rather re-  
 joice, that through obedience to the gospel  
 they were made heirs of eternal glory, and  
 had their names registered in the book of  
 life. The expectation of this may not only add  
 to



to the innocent pleasures of life, but also re- SERM.  
vive a man in the most afflicting circum- V.

stances; because he knows that in a little time he shall be set at liberty from all the evils of this life, and enter upon a state of inconceivable bliss; that his patient suffering, as well as his doing good, will be rewarded in the future state; and that whatsoever he suffers here for a good conscience, will be abundantly recompensed by an eternal weight of glory. Our Lord therefore says, *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven*, Mat. v. 11, 12. This precept they obeyed, and in the worst of evils took delight in their expected joy. Rom. v. 2. *By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also.* And when we consider the brevity of life, and the inconceivable duration of the future reward, have we not more cause to be cheerful than dejected in any condition, while we act well, and preserve our title to the glory above? Whether therefore we consider the Christian, as enlightened with the knowledge of the most important truths, and placed in a state of acceptance with God; as practising the virtues of the christian life, and satisfied that through the blessing of God all things shall

SERM. work together for his good; as having the  
 V. promise of divine assistance, and being an  
 heir of eternal glory; he has abundant cause  
 to bear evils with an even temper, and to be  
 of a cheerful spirit in every condition. He  
 may have sorrow at some times, but if he  
 give himself up to it, he acts below the  
 character of a Christian, who has so many  
 reasons to be always cheerful. They, who  
 had no knowledge of the true God, no cer-  
 tain hope of future blessedness, might be de-  
 jected and comfortless under present evils;  
 but Christians, who are his children, and  
 heirs of eternal glory, should not be aban-  
 doned to grief and despair. They should  
 bear evils with that decency and cheerfulness,  
 which may answer to the great advantages  
 they enjoy; and not let their passions  
 get the better of their reason, but by their  
 faith keep down their sorrow, and rejoice in  
 hope of the glory of God.

I SHOULD now procede to the remaining heads, but these must be the subject of another discourse.



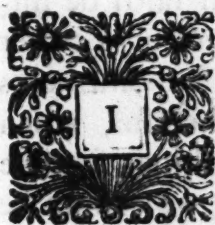
## S E R M O N VI.

The reasons why Christians should  
always rejoice.

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I T H E S S. V. 16.

*Rejoice evermore.*



HAVE shewn you, in a former discourse, that the rejoicing, which the apostle here recommends to us, is a constant cheerfulness of spirit arising from a just sense of those many inestimable blessings, which as Christians we possess, or hope to receive. Tho we may take an innocent pleasure in the temporal good things, which God gives us; yet the chief cause of our gladness should be the spiritual blessings, he has conferred upon us in Jesus Christ. We should not so much rejoice in the prosperity of our present affairs, as that we are inlightened with the knowledge of the most important truths, and are put into a state of salvation by the gospel of our blessed Saviour. This

S E R M.  
VI.



SERM. cheerfulness should be our prevailing and

VI. fixed disposition; for tho we may sometimes have cause to be sorry, yet in the midst of all our sorrows we should be glad, that we are Christians, and heirs of eternal glory. Our religion does not require us to be insensible of evils, and to be above all grief; but to moderate our passions, that our concern for present evils may never be greater than our joy in believing. We are therefore frequently exhorted to rejoice in times of affliction, which the apostles were inabled to do in all their sufferings for Christ, *as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing*, 2 Cor. vi. 10. Why may not we then, if our faith be sincere, take delight in the prospect of a better life, when we meet with disappointments and afflictions, as well as be cheerful, when the world smiles upon us, and things succede according to our wishes? Tho we cannot be unconcerned, when men speak evil of us falsely; yet we may be glad, that we have not justly deserved any reproaches; and when we suffer the loss of present things, we may rejoice, that in heaven we have *a better and an enduring substance*. It does not become Christians to be wholly given up to a gloomy, disconsolate frame. They should moderate and get the better of their sorrow, because they have good reasons to be of an even, cheerful temper in every condition. They may rejoice, that they have the knowledge of the truth, which cheers  
the

the understanding, as light does the eye; **SERM.**  
and that God has forgiven their sins, and is **VI.**  
reconciled to them through Jesus Christ. 

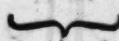
The practice of virtue according to his precepts, and the consideration of their being under the special care of the supreme Being, may also fill them with perpetual serenity. The promise of divine assistance, and the hope of eternal blessedness, may inspire them with cheerfulness in the performance of their duty, and in all the evils they suffer in this life. These things were then observed to be just matter of continual rejoicing to all sincere Christians. And I shall now go on to shew,

**III.** BY what means this happy temper may be attained.

NOW the contemplation of the works of God, and the injoyment of good company will give some diversion to our grief, and inspire more cheerful thoughts. We should likewise frequently meditate on those things, which are the cause of our rejoicing, especially in a time of adversity. But in particular,

**I.** WE should take great care in the government of our thoughts, and watch over the first motions of them. If they are neglected at first, they will become headstrong, and like a torrent which has broken the banks, will not be easily reduced within proper bounds. If we let them run upon the  
the

SERM. the evils which afflict us, and do not indea-

VI.  your to take them off, they will be continually fixed upon them. The longer these thoughts are indulged, the more heavily will they sit upon our spirits, and fill us with greater anxiety. In time we shall come to have little, or no command over them; and shall be always ruminating on the evils we have suffered, or anticipating those we fear. Thus we shall be wholly taken up with sad reflexions and gloomy fears; we shall find it difficult to turn our thoughts another way, and shall be always devising every thing which can aggravate our case, and fancy ourselves to be far more miserable than we really are. The neglect of the thoughts in this respect is, I doubt not, the cause why many Christians lead a joyless life, and imagine themselves to be more wretched than any people upon the earth, when they have reason to rejoice in comparison of many thousands. In order therefore to prevent excessive grief, instead of giving way to uneasy thoughts, we must oppose and suppress them at first; and turn our minds to the contemplation of those things, which may give us comfort. When the Psalmist was almost overwhelmed with trouble, he gave a check to his fears, and animated himself with the thoughts of God. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance,*



*tenance, and my God,* Psal. xliii. 5. When SERM.  
any evils therefore afflict us, let us not al- VI.  
ways dwell upon them; let us rather con-  
sider the righteous government of God, and  
the gracious ends of all his dispensations;  
let us remember his inexpressible goodness  
to us in Jesus Christ, and anticipate our fu-  
ture joys by devout meditations. Thus grief  
will not totally discompose and break our  
spirits, but will be allayed with many agree-  
able thoughts; and tho we may have our  
intervals of sorrow in this life, yet joy will  
be our reigning temper.

2. ANOTHER expedient to attain this  
constant cheerfulness, is to form just concep-  
tions of almighty God. For as we depend  
on him, and by his judgment our future  
state will be irreversibly fixed; so the no-  
tions we entertain of him, must very much  
affect the peace of our minds. False opi-  
nions concerning him may fill us with su-  
perstitious fears, and desponding thoughts.  
Great part of that religious melañcholy,  
which overspread and depressed the minds  
of so many good people in former times;  
which disturbed, and tormented them with  
so many fears about their eternal state, was  
occasioned by wrong conceptions of God,  
no less unworthy of his blessed perfections,  
than contrary to the gracious dispensation of  
the gospel. They represented him to them-  
selves as a being of implacable resentments,  
who would have no mercy upon sinners,

SERM. unless the demands of his vindictive justice

VI. were fully satisfied. Nay, they supposed  
him to act by mere sovereign power, and to do all things for his own glory; and that to glorify his holiness and power, he would condemn to endless torments the far greatest part of mankind. Who could think of such a being with a cheerful heart? Who could have lasting and sure hope of salvation in this belief? Some few men indeed of sanguine tempers might please themselves with the thoughts of the partiality of God towards them in electing them to eternal salvation unconditionally, in which nevertheless they might be mistaken; while others of less sanguine tempers spent great part of their lives in dreadful fears of eternal reprobation: and even they, who were sometimes elevated with the most ravishing thoughts of the discriminating grace of God to themselves, were as much dejected, when the temperature of their blood was altered by diseases, or their minds extraordinarily overwhelmed by afflicting circumstances. How different from this and more worthy of God, how much more encouraging to sinners, and more comfortable to all men is the scripture account? It declares God to be supremely good, and even love itself; a tender father, who tho he is offended with the wicked actions of his children, yet is heartily concerned for their good, and takes proper measures to recover them from the evil

evil of their ways. It resolves not the incarnation and death of Christ into his vindictive justice, but into his undeserved mercy; not as making him propitious, but as the effect of his propitiousness towards sinners. Because he is infinitely good, and in himself reconcilable to offenders, therefore he sent Jesus Christ to die for us, that we might have the highest assurance of his willingness to forgive repenting sinners. Can any thing be plainer than this from the words of the blessed Jesus himself, who says, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life,* John iii. 16? Of himself therefore he was propitious to sinners, and his infinite wisdom directed to that way, in which he chose to be reconciled to them, through Jesus Christ the only mediator. The scripture no where represents men suffering for the mere pleasure of God, but for their own wilful sins against him; nor does it tell us, that Christ died for a few only, but that he *tasted death for every man*. And if we consider things in this view, and believe according to the scriptures, that Christ gave his life a ransom for all; we have no cause to doubt, that he will be merciful to us, if we sincerely repent; no cause to fear that we shall not be saved, if we observe the terms of salvation proposed to us in the gospel. We may always look up to heaven with gladness,

SERM.  
VI.



SERM. nefs, because we are sure of the good will  
 VI. of God ; and know that he has no pleasure  
 { in our sufferings, but really desires our good ;  
 and will graciously give us all those assistances,  
 which are necessary to our obtaining  
 eternal salvation.

3. WE should likewise cultivate those virtues, which more especially tend to promote inward peace and satisfaction. For tho all virtue has this tendency, as was shewn in my former discourse ; yet there are some virtues, which have a more immediate influence upon the quiet and repose of our spirits. Such is humility, which consists in having no higher opinion of ourselves than we truly deserve ; and will secure our inward peace by preventing many things, which would ruffle and discompose us. The humble man is not uneasy, when he is not respected so much as he ought to be ; because he thinks modestly of himself, and is not fond of praise. He can bear with ease those affronts, which would gaul and disturb a proud man. Meekness is another virtue, which will tend very much to preserve in us an even, cheerful temper ; for this consists in governing our anger, that it may not run into excess ; and disposes us to forbearance under provocations, and to forgive them, who have offended us. He, who really possesses this virtue, may always enjoy himself, and is not to be put out of temper by unkind usage. He can be easy under ill treatment,

treatment, because he has not deserved it; **SERM.**  
and even rejoice in the consideration of his **VI.**  
integrity, and the hope of his future re-  
ward. His meek temper does not put him  
upon those measures, which give trouble af-  
terwards, as all immoderate resentments and  
acts of revenge never fail to do. His com-  
mand over himself under provocations pre-  
serves his mind in a peaceful state; and his  
forgiving those, who have injured him, fills  
him with the most exquisite and godlike  
pleasure. Another virtue, which will great-  
ly promote his constant cheerfulness, is a  
firm, unshaken trust in God. The righteous  
man, who casts his care on the Almighty,  
will be much more fearless in all dangers,  
much more easy in all afflictions, much  
more composed in all events, than he, who  
puteth not his trust in him. It will free his  
mind from many disquieting thoughts, and  
fill him with good hopes, that all things will  
be for his good in the end. With what un-  
speakable delight will he always think of  
the infinite goodness, wisdom, and power of  
God, and all the instances of his faithfulness  
to upright men in former ages? This trust  
in God has been the support of good men  
in all their troubles. It enabled David to  
keep down his fears, and in every danger  
and distress, to comfort himself with the  
hope of safety and deliverance. *Because thou  
hast been my help; therefore in the shadow of  
thy wings will I rejoice,* Psal. lxxiii. 7. This  
filled

SERM. filled Daniel and other pious men with that

VI. intrepid courage, that sweet composure of mind, that wonderful serenity, which they shewed in the severest trials and most distressing circumstances, such as none of us shall ever be called to suffer. And why may not we then by placing our trust in him, and resigning ourselves to his will, secure the tranquillity of our minds; and preserve a cheerful temper in all those lesser evils, which fall to our share in the ordinary course of things?

4. To the practice of these particular virtues, we must add sincerity, which is not indeed one single virtue; but the truth, the life and the beauty of all virtue, and will be the most effectual means of preserving this cheerful frame at all times. Tho our religion gives us abundant cause for rejoicing always, yet we shall not be the better for this, if our belief and practice of it be not sincere. If we are not upright in the profession of religion, but are conscious to ourselves that we live unsuitably to it, this will destroy all the pleasure and comfort we might have in doing good. Without sincerity we can have no true satisfaction in religious actions, no comfortable hopes in God, no pleasing views of another world. For as Job says, *The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment*, ch. xx. 5. In order therefore to receive from our holy religion



all that joy, which it is capable of inspiring, SERM.  
we must be influenced by it in all our ac- VI.  
tions, and be religious indeed. If we act   
from right principles, and keep a good con-  
science, we shall have no cause to dread the  
anger of God, but may delight in the sense  
of his love; we shall not reflect upon our  
past conduct with shame and regret, but  
may take pleasure in what we have done.  
No man has greater reason to rejoice than  
the upright. The Psalmist therefore says,  
*Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous,*  
*and shout for joy all ye who are upright in*  
*heart.* Whatsoever present troubles happen  
to the sincere man, the consciousness of his  
integrity will give him inward peace; his  
interest in the favor of God, and his right  
to eternal blessedness will bear him up with  
cheerfulness. But I procede to shew,

IV. WHAT considerations should induce  
us to acquire and preserve a cheerful tem-  
per at all times. And,

I. LET us consider the unprofitableness  
of the contrary passion, and the great ad-  
vantage of a cheerful spirit. If we give  
ourselves up to grief, when things cross our  
expectations and men use us ill, what  
can this avail? Can it either undo what is  
past, or mend our present circumstances?  
Can it prevent any future evils, or alleviate  
those we suffer? Whether we are troubled  
in mind, or cheerful, our outward circum-  
stances

SERM. stances will be much the same. But tho

VI. immoderate grief can do us no good, it  
~~~~ may do us a great deal of mischief by  
disturbing our thoughts; so that we cannot
think of those measures, which might redress
our affairs; nor consider those things,
which might mitigate the sense of the evils
we suffer. It adds to affliction, and makes
it abundantly more hard to bear. The greatness
of evils is not so much to be estimated
by what they are in themselves, as by our
apprehensions of them. A slight evil will
really become great, if we are much troubled
about it; and one much heavier in itself
will be light and easy, when born with a
sedate and even temper. Besides, all evils
are under the direction of the supreme Being,
and are indeed designed to promote our
chiefest good. And while we are cheerful
under them, we may consider for what end
they are sent, and receive great benefit by
all our afflictions. We shall be led by them
to consider of our ways, and to correct our
past sins; to see the vanity of this world,
and to live more circumspectly, that we
may obtain a better state hereafter. And if
we are made more pure and heavenly minded
by what we suffer, it will yield us a great
deal of comfort and pleasure; whereas over-
much grief and discontent will so take up
our thoughts, that we cannot rightly consider;
and instead of making a right use of
afflictions,

afflictions, we shall only torment ourselves SERM.
by musing perpetually upon them. VI.

2. AN even and cheerful spirit is most 
beneficial both to our minds and bodies;
it is abundantly more easy than a heavy
heart, and is indeed the right temper of a
rational soul. Much grief and continual
thinking on sad objects wonderfully breaks
the mind, and impairs all its faculties. It
destroys the quickness of the perception,
and sprightliness of the imagination; it de-
faces those images of things, which are im-
printed on the memory; and weakens the
judgment by distracting the attention. Cheer-
fulness on the contrary preserves every facul-
ty in full vigor, nay, improves it by an un-
disturbed exercise. When the mind is easy,
it takes in things more quickly, than when
it is full of grief; it can more readily call
up past ideas, and more closely consider any
premises in order to form a true judgment.
If we would therefore improve our minds,
we should banish all immoderate grief, as
well as all sinful passions from our hearts,
and preserve that calm and joyful disposition,
which is so suitable to our holy religion.
And as such a temper will have the most
kindly influence upon our nobler part, so it
will be most healthful to our bodies. The
whole animal œconomy will go on much
better, when we are easy and composed,
than when we are dejected and full of sor-
row. Much sadness relaxes the fibres, palls

SERM. the stomach, vitiates the blood, causes ob-

VI. structions, consumes the spirits, and impairs
 the strength. Hence it is, that persons, who grieve excessively, fall into various distempers, and pine away with languishing and consumptive disorders. *The sorrow of the world worketh death*, as St. Paul justly observes, 2 Cor. vii. 10. On the other hand cheerfulness promotes digestion, quickens the motion of the blood, supplies the expense of spirits, and makes the whole body more lightsome and easy. *A merry heart doth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones*, Prov. xvii. 22. This every one knows, and must therefore acknowledge, that our religion consults our good, by commanding us to be of a cheerful temper. And shall we not endeavour to observe a precept, which will be so much for the ease of our minds, and the health of our bodies; and will consequently inable us to enjoy ourselves, and make us happy in every state? When a man is overwhelmed with grief, he is uneasy to himself; and the more his faculties are broken, and his health impaired, the less injoyment has he of his own being. His thoughts are so much disturbed by the evils, which he suffers, that he cannot enjoy the good things, which fall to his share. On the other hand the cheerful man always enjoys himself, and does not only better relish the blessings he receives from the hand of God; but has also a less sensation
 of

of the evils of life. Life is a pleasure to SERM.
him even in bad circumstances, which is a VI.
burden to an uneasy and discontented person 
in a much better condition.

3. WE should likewise consider, which will make us most agreeable to others, a cheerful temper kept up by religious principles, or a mind dejected with sorrow and sadness. We are social beings, and should therefore cultivate in ourselves those dispositions, which will make us most useful and acceptable to them, with whom we converse; and should not give way to such, as will render our company unpleasant, and tiresome. But it is certain the man, who abandons himself to grief, is no less uneasy to others, than he is to himself. For sorrow, which vitiates the blood, and impairs the health, sours the temper also, and is the cause of peevishness and anger. He will therefore trouble others with too many complaints, and will not behave with that good humor, affability, and kindness, which would make him agreeable to them. Not but that one friend may ease his mind to another by telling his grievances, that he may receive advice and comfort; but I am now speaking of them, who give way to immoderate grief, which spoils their conversation, as well as their temper, and makes them disagreeable to their company by endless complaints, and perpetual gloominess. The cheerful man, if his mirth be under the government

SERM. of religion, is the most agreeable companion. He infuses his own joy into them, with whom he converses, and gives them pleasure by his conversation. He does not saden their minds by unseasonable complaints, but promotes their mirth by his own cheerfulness. As he is not disturbed with excessive grief, so he can think of those things, which may comfort himself, and can also administer advice and consolation to others in their afflictions. 2 Cor. i. 4. *Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

4. ANOTHER thing, which should greatly affect us, is this, that perpetual rejoicing is the imployment and happiness of the blessed in heaven. Nothing, I think, should more powerfully ingage us to any duty than this, that it will not only be rewarded in the future state, but will there be the very temper and exercise of the righteous; which is so true of that cheerfulness I am discouraging upon, that the future blessedness of good men is represented by joy. Matt. xxv. 21. *His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* In the Psalms our blessed Lord is introduced saying, *In thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures*

tures for evermore, Psal. xvi. 11. In other S E R M. places it is set forth by those things, which VI. give us contentment, and fill us with delight. 

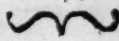
We are assured, that it will be a state of perfect knowledge and sanctity, than which nothing can yield more solid pleasure to intelligent beings. And if those small improvements in knowledge, which we here make, give us increasing pleasure; how much greater cause shall we have to rejoice, when we know as we are known, and are let into the knowledge of those things, which are inscrutable to us at present? If we have pleasure in all good actions, tho imperfectly done, how inexpressibly great will our joy be, when we shall attain to sinless perfection? What inconceivable transports will the righteous feel, when from the heavenly shore they view all the storms and dangers they passed in this world, and are arrived at a state of immutable bliss! Their joy will be complete, because they will be perfectly happy, and they will for ever rejoice in the Lord, because they will for ever live in his presence, where there will be no pain, no losses, no sin, no sorrow to give the least interruption to their joy. *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*, Rev. xxi. 4. When they are delivered from all evil, and possess perfect happiness in his presence, well may they re-

SERM. joice, and perpetually sing his praises from a
 VI. sense of his goodness and their own felicity.

Let us therefore endeavour to attain that blessed temper, which will be the happiness of the saints above. We cannot indeed reach the perfection of it here; because many imperfections and evils attend us in this life, and will sometimes abate, if not interrupt our rejoicing: but yet we should endeavour to drive all sadness from our hearts, which is so unsuitable to that happy state, in which we hope to live for ever; and to be always cheerfully disposed, that we may be the better prepared for the joys above.

I HAVE now shewn the nature of this rejoicing, what reasons Christians have to be cheerful at all times, by what means this happy temper may be attained, and what considerations may induce us to labor after it. And from the whole it appears,

I. THAT this precept is not inconsistent with any other doctrine or command of Christ. He pronounces them blessed, who mourn, Matt. v. 4; by which he does not oblige us to be sorrowful, but if we meet with those things, which are grievous and afflicting, he assures us that we shall be comforted hereafter, if we bear them well. This very promise may temper all our sorrow with gladness, and turn our grief into joy. For our sins indeed we ought to mourn, but this godly sorrow will soon compose our disquieted minds, and end in the

the sweetest injoyment of ourselves. Sin is S E R M.
the parent of sorrow and trouble, while true VI.
repentance is always attended with inward 
peace, and a delightful sense of the divine
mercy. What can yield a man a more ra-
tional and manly pleasure than that conquest
over his evil habits, which the sincere peni-
tent has gained? How great is the pleasure
he has in knowing, that all his sins are for-
given? In the favor of God he has more
solid, more lasting comfort, than all the
prosperity of this world can afford to impeni-
tent sinners.

2. T H O S E young persons are mistaken,
who seek for pleasure in the ways of sin,
and shun the paths of virtue as gloomy and
unpleasant. For sin is the principal source
of all the sorrows we suffer in this life.
Whatever pleasure the gratification of a sin-
ful lust yields, it is soon lost in bitter re-
flexions. All vicious practices are attended
with shame, and produce many other ill ef-
fects, which turn that transient pleasure they
give into lasting trouble. On the other hand
religion removes all those occasions of sorrow,
which sin brings; and besides this, it allows of
all the innocent pleasures of life, and inables
us to rejoice on much higher accounts. It
keeps the conscience easy, which is the
greatest help to true mirth; and gives us
cause to rejoice in the happy effects of our
obedience, which we now experience, and
in those eternal blessings we hope to injoy,
Let

SERM. Let not the young therefore shun religion as

VI. an enemy to mirth, but imbrace it as the
greatest friend to true pleasure. When we have done evil indeed, it enjoins repentance; which is necessary to avoid much greater evils, the horrors of a wounded conscience, and the miseries of the world to come; to restore the tranquillity of our minds, and to give us that injoyment of ourselves, that confidence in God, that hope of glory, in which our true pleasure and happiness consist. If therefore they would not imbrace a shadow for the substance, nor be cheated by false and deceitful pleasures; if they would lay a sure foundation for true satisfaction and continual joy; let them govern all their passions, and conduct their whole lives by the precepts of Jesus Christ.

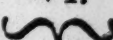
3. ALL that mirth is sinful, which wears out the inward sense of religion, and takes men off from the practice of virtue. Tho a cheerful spirit is easy to ourselves, and becomes our holy profession; yet we must guard against excessive lightness and vanity of spirit, and take care that we do not give into immoderate and sensual pleasures. There are too many persons, both young and old, who are wholly taken up with the vain amusements of life, and contrive how to pass away their time in a circle of immoderate diversions; who delight in gay and vain company, and are never pleased, but when they are at balls, plays, or other public

lic entertainments. But, alas! this gay, and SERM.
giddy life dissipates their thoughts, and leaves VI.
no time for consideration, and gives them {
an utter aversion to all serious reflexions.

They neither review their past actions, nor think of their future state with due attention; and therefore neglect the concerns of their souls, and do what will sometime end in the keenest sorrows, and most piercing vexation of heart. But certainly such levity of mind and irregular diversions do not become them, who believe the christian religion. For as this may inable us to rejoice always, so it directs us to temper our mirth with sobriety. It calls us to repent of our sins, it obliges us to observe the strictest rules of virtue, it teaches us the certainty of a future judgment; and therefore our rejoicing should not be such as makes us neglect our duty, but results from the consciousness of having performed it with sincerity. The pleasure, which flows from the sincere practice of virtue, will continually increase in proportion to the proficiency we make; whereas the vain mirth of this world, all sensual pleasures, as Solomon observes, are like the crackling of thorns under the pot, which make a short blaze and noise, but are presently consumed and spent. If we take up with vain and sensual pleasures, we shall soon be convinced, that we have made an imprudent choice: and when death comes, we shall be sadly vexed that
for

SERM. for these empty and fleeting delights, we
VI. have deprived ourselves of the favor of God,
and are unprepared for a better world; when
we might not only have had more substantial
pleasures in a virtuous life, but been charmed
also with the prospect of immortal glory.

4. THEY have no just cause for mirth, who have renounced the christian religion, and given into unbelief. Some persons, who are unhappily sunk into a licentious and dissolute course of life, are very uneasy, when they consider the precepts of the gospel, and the account it gives of a future state. They plainly perceive, that they cannot be happy, if the christian religion be true; and yet they will not mortify their passions, nor desist from their evil customs. Hence they begin to wish that religion was not true, and in time persuade themselves that it is false; not because they have impartially considered the grounds of it, and are able to shew, that this world is not the work of an intelligent being, that the christian institution is neither worthy of God in itself, nor sufficiently attested; but because it forbids those vitious habits, which they have contracted, and those sensual pleasures, in which is all their delight. But in this they are influenced by prejudice, and judge not according to reason; and if they would so far suspect their judgment, as more seriously to consider, they would soon be convinced, that the practice of those things, which the christian

christian religion forbids, is neither for their S E R M.
health, reputation, nor interest; and that it VI.
will be infinitely better upon all accounts to 
regulate their whole conduct by the precepts
of Christ. But they glory in their disre-
gard to religion, and their unbelief. And
when they have made shipwreck of faith,
as well as put away a good conscience, they
may, I confess, sin with less remorse and
more licentiousness, than when they retain-
ed the belief of Jesus Christ. But how
miserable is their case? When they come
to die, they must leave the world with dis-
mal thoughts of being wholly extinguished
in the grave, or with fearful misgivings a-
bout their future state; while the sincere
believer may triumph in the delightful re-
membrance of his pious actions, and the
ravishing views of his eternal felicity.

5. W E should endeavour to promote this
cheerful temper in one another. This is a
duty enjoined by our holy religion, tho very
little notice is taken of it; and is more espe-
cially incumbent on them, who are mem-
bers of the same societies. When St. Paul
places joy among the fruits of the spirit,
Gal. v. 17. he is not to be understood of that
joy, which we possess in ourselves, but of that
we create in others by our good behaviour.
We should therefore desire that others may
rejoice, and promote this cheerfulness in
them, as much as we can. For this end
we should not only represent to them such
things,

SERM. things, as will assuage their grief, and dis-

VI. pose them to be cheerful; but our whole
 ~~~~~ conversation towards them should be such,  
 as will give them pleasure. We should never delight in what will disquiet and grieve others, nor do what will give them cause to be displeased and sorrowful. This is not the conduct of one, who is guided by the spirit of Christ, but rather that of a wicked man, who is governed and instigated by an evil temper. And if we should inadvertently say or do what grieves another, we should be sorry for it, as soon as we perceive it; and not be easy with ourselves, till we have removed the cause by plainly manifesting our innocency, or ingenuously acknowledging our fault, and making satisfaction. We should be so far from wilfully doing what may trouble and vex any man, that we should consult his peace, and do what may give him joy. We should not provoke and disturb him by any unkindness and injustice, but by all our words and actions give him abundant cause to be satisfied. When St. Paul exhorts the Christians at Rome not to grieve their brethren by eating those meats, from which they might without sinning abstain, he tells them, *That the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the holy Ghost*, ch. xiv. 17. We should not therefore grieve others by any thing, which we can innocently omit, but do what will please them; and while

*should always rejoice.*

175

we thus act, we imitate the blessed God, SERM.  
who by all the methods of his providence VI.  
and grace has furnished us with the best means of rejoicing. And by thus acting to-  
wards one another at present, we shall be  
prepared for that blessed place, where we  
shall not only be happy in ourselves, but  
also have the most perfect complacency in  
one another.



SERMON





## S E R M O N VII.

A defence of Elifha's curse.

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2 KINGS ii. 23, 24.

*And he went up from thence to Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up thou bald head, go up thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord: and there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.*

SERM.  
VII.



It is, I think, most generally supposed, that these little children were not come to years of discretion, and only derided the prophet for the baldness of his head in the gaiety and wantonness of their hearts. And they, who view the history in  
this

this light, tho they believe the Bible to be SERM.  
the word of God, are not fully satisfied with VII.

the conduct of the Prophet, but rather inclined to judge it was great severity to curse them so bitterly for this slight affront. No

wonder then that unbelievers, who cannot reconcile to the common principles of natural religion those false notions of this history, with which their minds were early prepos-  
sessed, are from thence disposed to censure the prophet as a cruel man; and to ridicule the scripture, because, as they imagine, it represents God fulfilling the passionate imprecation of an offended prophet. To vindicate

the prophet an ancient christian writer says:

“ When by the longsuffering of those, who

“ are treated contumeliously, no reformation

“ is effected, then severity is much more

“ useful for the incorrigible, than long suffer-

“ ing. We ought not therefore to blame

“ the prophet for this severity. For having

“ found that long suffering did not bring the

“ offenders to a sense of their sins, and that

“ the words, by which the children dishonor-

“ ed the prophet, were learnt of their parents,

“ who always bore hatred against the pro-

“ phets; — therefore he chastised the pa-

“ rents by cutting off the children, that they

“ might learn not to dishonor the prophets,

“ and through them, God himself.” But

if his cursing them must be considered as his

own

\* Quest. & Respons. ad Orthodox. p. 446. Ed. Par.  
MDCXXXVI.

SERM. own act alone, I cannot be persuaded, that

VII. the continuance of their wickedness would  
 excuse such bitter revenge; or that an angry  
 curse of the greatest prophet, proceeding from  
 his own resentment only, would ever take  
 effect. We must therefore find some better  
 way of accounting for his action, if we  
 would either intirely satisfy the doubts of  
 believers, or effectually answer those, who  
 oppose the authority of the Bible. The  
 latter indeed should impartially consider,  
 whether their notions of this history are right,  
 and can be supported by just remarks from  
 the original words, before they presume to  
 censure the prophet, and ridicule the Bible,  
 if they would act like men of candor, pru-  
 dence and learning. All their ridicule will  
 turn upon themselves, if it can be proved  
 from the history, that Elisha is neither in-  
 troduced cursing these children from a pas-  
 sionate temper, nor almighty God represented  
 gratifying a revengeful wish; both which I  
 hope will fully appear from my following  
 discourse, wherein I shall attempt to prove,

I. THAT these children derided Elisha, be-  
 cause he was a prophet of the true God.

II. THAT they were not innocent little  
 children, who were only set on by others  
 to mock him; but young persons, who act-  
 ed from the evil disposition of their own  
 hearts.

III.



III. THAT he did not curse these young SERM.  
idolaters in a peevish mood, and to be re- VII.  
venged upon them for their rude insults. ~~~~~

IV. THAT he only as a prophet foretold  
and denounced a curse, which, by the  
spirit of prophecy, he knew was coming  
upon them.

V. THAT this evil, considered as a judg-  
ment of God, was justly and wisely in-  
flicted upon these idolatrous youths. And,

I. THAT these children derided Elisha,  
because he was a prophet of the true God.

HE was then going up to that city,  
where God appeared to Jacob; and which  
was from thence called Bethel, which signi-  
fies the house of God. *And he called the  
name of that place Bethel: but the name of  
that city was called Luz at the first,* Gen.  
xxviii. 19. But at this time it was so far  
from deserving the name Jacob gave it, that  
it was become the chief seat of idolatry. Here  
Jeroboam set up one of his golden calves,  
that the people might not go to worship the  
true God at Jerusalem, and settled the priests  
of the high places, which he had erected.  
Here he ordained a feast for the children of  
Israel, and offered sacrifice upon the altar  
consecrated to his idol. This city therefore  
was the chief fountain of this new idolatry,  
which overspread all the kingdom of Israel;  
and for which God was so highly offended

SERM. with Jeroboam, that he determined to extir-

VII. pate his whole family. 1 Kings xiv. 9, 10,

11. But notwithstanding this place was so infected with idolatry, there remained some prophets of the true God, who were acquainted with Elijah, and knew that God would take him away. For when he went thither with Elisha not long before his assumption into heaven, it is said, 2 Kings ii. 3. *And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel, came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it, hold you your peace.* From Bethel they went together to Jericho, and from thence to Jordan; where Elijah divided the stream, so that they passed over on dry ground. When he was taken up to heaven, Elisha repassed the river in the same manner, and staid three days at Jericho in his return to Bethel; during which time, there is no reason to doubt, but the news of his master's ascension had reached that city; and was talked of by others as well as by the prophets, who resided there, and knew that he would be taken away. And it is highly probable, that the inhabitants had not only heard of Elijah's ascension; but had notice also, that Elisha was coming thither again. For the historian says, *As he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up thou bald head, go up thou bald head:*

in

in which words, as the same ancient writer SERM.  
 observes <sup>a</sup>, they plainly made a mock of Eli- VII.  
 jah's ascension. And this would have been  
 plain to every reader, if the word had been  
 translated, *Ascend*, as it might have been.  
 How the prophet came to be bald, we know  
 not; but supposing it was through age, their  
 mocking him was a violation of the law of  
 God, Lev. xix. 32. *Thou shalt rise up before*  
*the hoary head, and honour the face of the old*  
*man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord.* Not  
 to give due honor to the aged, and much  
 more to despise and mock them, was by the  
 antients reckoned highly criminal in young  
 persons <sup>b</sup>. But his baldness was not the only  
 subject of their derision. He was here known  
 to be a prophet of the God of Israel, and no  
 children, who worshiped him, would have  
 derided his prophet upon any account; for  
 which reason we must conclude, that they  
 were the children of idolaters, brought up in  
 the contempt of the true God, and of his  
 prophets. And tho it should be supposed that  
 they accidentally met him; yet their crime  
 in mocking him, from their zeal for idolatry,  
 and aversion to true religion was the same.  
 But if we well attend to the words of the  
 historian, it is in them plainly implied, that  
 they went out on purpose. For he says not,

N 3 that

<sup>a</sup> Τὸ γὰρ, ἀνάβαινε Φαλακρὸν, πρὸς διασυρμὸν ἔλεγον τῆς τῆ  
 βαλίας ἀναλήψεως. Ibid.

<sup>b</sup> Credebant hoc grande nefas, & morte piandum,  
 Si juvenis vetulo non assurrexerit. Juv. Sat. xiii. 54.



SERM. that some children, who happened to be in  
 VII. the way, mocked him; but that, *as he was*

going up by the way, there went little children out of the city, and mocked him. And they would not have gone out to deride and insult him, if they had not hated him as a prophet of that God, whose worship they had abandoned. They did not therefore deride him for his baldness only, but having an aversion to him on the account of his religion and office, they reproached him with it; as it is common for persons to throw out silly and unjust reflexions in the heat of their zeal. The historian repeats their words twice, *Ascend thou bald head, Ascend thou bald head*, to shew that they continued their insults, in order to vent the anger of their minds; for so Shimei's are twice repeated, when, from his inveterate malice, he so long and so bitterly reviled and cursed David. They did not go out to deride him only, but to keep him out of the city likewise. When they said, *Ascend thou bald head*, they scoffed at the ascension of Elijah, as I have intimated; and plainly shewed, that they would not have him come into their city. The sense of their words is: What do you come here for, you bald head? Ascend after your master Elijah, that we may never see you again, nor hear any more of your predictions. They feared he would be as zealous against idolatry, as his master had been; and therefore they wished him also out of their way, and were not willing

that

that he should come into their city. And SERM.  
this appears from the history itself. For VII.  
Elifha, being insulted by these idolatrous youths, did not procede on his intended journey to Bethel; but was going back, when upon their continued insults, as it is reasonable to suppose from the repetition of their words, he received a command from God to curse them; for it is said, *And he turned back, and looked on them.* And when he had pronounced the curse, he held on his way from the city; for it is added, *And he went from thence to mount Carmel.* They did not therefore only deride him as a prophet of God, but also prevented his going up to Bethel; and consequently, when they mocked him, saying, *Ascend thou bald head, ascend thou bald head,* they did not bid him go up to the city, for they were driving him from thence, but derided the ascension of Elijah.

II. THEY were not innocent little children, who were only set on by others to mock him; but young persons, who acted from the evil disposition of their own hearts.

FOR they had sucked in the idolatry of their fathers, and were old enough to distinguish between the two religions. They knew that Elifha was a prophet of the God of Israel, and derided him on the account of his office. They had heard of Elijah's ascension, and bid him likewise ascend, in a way of derision and contempt. They went out on

SERM. purpose to mock him, and to prevent his  
VII. coming into the city. When all these things  
are fairly considered, we shall apprehend reason to conclude, that, whether they went out of their own inclination and choice, or were set on by others, they were not so very young, as is generally thought; but such as had idolatrous principles riveted in them, and had conceived ill will against him, as a zealous opposer of their idolatry. Nor is it reasonable to suppose, that the prophet would have turned back for children, who were so young that they could have no ill meaning in their words; who neither attempted, nor were able to keep him out of the city: or that they would have been cut off in so dreadful a manner, if they had not derided him as a prophet, but only mocked him out of childish wantonness. For how could this judgment effectually awaken their parents, or the other citizens to repent of their idolatry, for which good end we may justly suppose it was inflicted, if these children were not insulting him as a prophet of the God of Israel, from their zeal for their idol, when it came upon them? The punishment therefore inflicted upon them may likewise induce us to believe, that they were not innocent children; but young persons at years of understanding, who bore malice against him for reproving their wicked rites and customs. Nor is there any reason to think otherwise from either of the two Hebrew words, which  
are



are translated, *children*, in the text <sup>a</sup>. It must be acknowledged, that they often denote children newly born, or under years of discretion; and thus the latter, which properly signifies a son, occurs in the history of Moses's birth, Exod. ii. 6. and the former is used in speaking of Samuel, when he was weaned by his mother, 1 Sam. i. 24. But there is a great number of other passages of scripture, in which they must be understood of children, who had arrived to years of discretion, and were accountable to God for their actions, as the things related of them manifestly shew. The son of Jeroboam, who died, is called *a child*, 1 Kings xiv. 12, 17, in which verses both these words are used; but we must not conclude, that he was not come to years of understanding, because it is said in the thirteenth verse, *In him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel*. We must likewise suppose, that the children mentioned in the text were at years of discretion; because there was found in them some evil thing against the Lord God of Israel, for which they were punished. The age of that young prince is not related; but it may be observed, that Ishmael is denominated *a lad* by the first of these words, Gen. xxi. 12. and *a child* by the second, ver. 14, when he mocked Isaac: and could not be less than fifteen or sixteen years of age, as will evidently appear by comparing the time of his birth or circum-

SERM.  
VII.  
~~~~~

SERM. circumcision with the time of Isaac's birth
VII. and weaning. Gen. xvi. 16. xvii. 23. xxi.

It is expressly said in Gen. xxxvii. 2, that Joseph was seventeen years of age, when he was sold by his brethren; where the former of these words is used in the Hebrew, and he is stiled *a lad* in our English translation: but the latter occurs in the 30th verse, where Reuben's words are related; *And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not, and I, whither shall I go?* The sacred historian in speaking of the sons of Eli, when they officiated as priests, and committed the most detestable crimes, makes use of the former word, 1 Sam. ii. 17, where we read, *young men*, in our English Bible: and the other is spoken of Daniel and his three companions, when they were not only judged to be *skilful in all wisdom*; but were also truly pious, and acted from the firmest principles of religion. The age of these pious young men is not specified, but what is said of them sufficiently shews, that the children mentioned in the text might be old enough to act from vicious principles, since they are described by the same word. I must add, that neither of the words used in the text is limited to the first years of understanding, but extends sometimes to the twenty fifth, thirtieth, or fortieth year of life. For Isaac by the first of these words is called *a lad*, Gen. ~~xi.~~ 12; when he was twenty five years old, as some conjecture, or twenty eight, as others suppose.

ſuppoſe. By this likewiſe Pharaoh's butler SERM.
 calls *Joſeph a young man*, Gen. xli. 12; when VII.
 he was thirty years of age, as appears from
 the forty ſixth verſe. *And Joſeph was thirty*
years old, when he ſtood before Pharaoh King
of Egypt. Thus alſo Rehoboam is termed *a*
young man, 2 Chron. xiii. 7, tho he was up-
 wards of forty years old at the ſame time:
 which is certain from another place, where
 it is plainly ſaid, that he was forty one, when
 he came to the throne, ch. xii. 13. And it
 is remarkable, that the other word is uſed in
 ſpeaking of thoſe *young men*, whoſe pernicious
 counſel he followed; and who, it is expreſſly
 ſaid, *were grown up with him*, and muſt
 conſequently be about his age. 1 Kings xii.
 8. The words therefore uſed in our text
 might be tranſlated youths, or young men;
 and thus perhaps our translators would have
 turned them, if the word *little*^a had not been
 added in the Hebrew. But I ſee no juſt
 cauſe to conclude from hence, that they were
 not grown up to years of underſtanding; for
 this word may only intimate, that they had
 not reached the utmoſt time of life, which
 is ſometimes expreſſed by thoſe words; but
 were younger perſons of different ages, yet
 none ſo young, as not to be accountable for
 their actions. The two words tranſlated *lit-*
tle children in my text are uſed in ſpeaking of
 that Hebrew maid, who was taken by the
 Syrians, 2 Kings v. 2^b, where ſhe is called

SERM. *a little maid* in our Bible; tho it appears from
 VII. what is said of her, that she was grown up
 to years of discretion. For she did not only
 wait upon Naaman's wife, but from the mi-
 racles which Elisha had done, she believed
 he was a true prophet, and could cure her
 master of his leprosy. The word rendered
little signifies young in other places, and is
 used in speaking of them who were but
 young, considering the place they filled, or
 the age of others to whom they stood related.
 Solomon in his prayer, 1 Kings iii. 7. says,
And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made
thy servant king instead of David my father,
and I am but a little child. From whence
 we must not infer, that he was but twelve
 years old, as a Jewish writer supposes, much
 less that he was considerably under that age;
 for he had then reigned some time, and his
 father gave him the character of a wise man,
 when he was crowned. He only meant,
 that he was a very young man, being about
 twenty, as some conjecture, considering the
 great work, to which he was called, as this
 place may be explained from the words of
 his father, 1 Chron. xxii. 5. Thus Benja-
 min is called *a little one*, Gen. xlv. 20. be-
 cause he was but young in comparison of
 some of his brethren, tho he was then the
 father of several children, as appears from
 another place, Gen. xlv. 21. From all these
 instances, the three last especially, we may
 evidently perceive, that there is no necessity
 of

of supposing from the original text, that these SERM.
were children so small as to be incapable of VII.
having any ill design in their words and ac- 
tions; but young persons at years of maturity,
who acted from bad principles, and offered
contempt to the prophet and worship of the
true God.

III. THE prophet did not curse these
young idolaters in a peevish mood, and to be
revenged upon them for their rude insults.

No doubt it grieved this holy man to see
idolatry established at Bethel; to behold so
many young persons trained up in the igno-
rance and contempt of true religion, so in-
tirely devoted to idolatrous and wicked cus-
toms. He could not but be displeased with
their insult offered to himself, and their bitter
enmity to the worship of the true God; but
he did not curse them from a spirit of re-
venge, because they rudely treated and de-
ridged his person; nor with this great evil to
them from a principle of zeal, because they
were haters of his religion, and worshiped
idols. There is no reason from any part of
his conduct to imagine, that his mind burned
with such fierce resentments and unmerciful
zeal. It is said, *He turned back*, but this
word is of indifferent signification, and had
they said some good things, for which he
had turned himself to bless them, this action
would have been expressed by the same word.
It imports not therefore any thing like anger,
but

SERM. but only describes the motion of his body;

VII. when he turned himself to speak, that all the company might hear his words, and know that this great judgment came upon them for contemning the worship of the true God, in whose name the curse was pronounced. When he had turned himself, He *looked on them, and cursed them*; but even this will not prove, that he had any greater displeasure and resentment in his breast, than became a good man; or that he wished this untimely end to them from a passionate and revengeful heart. It must be allowed, and is indeed selfevident, that, if nothing but his own wrath and zeal had moved him to curse them, they would have been secure enough from all harm. Tho he had ever so much anger against them within himself, ever so earnestly and passionately wished their death, he had no power to inflict this dire calamity upon them. He could not command these savage creatures to tear them in pieces, nor so much as know of himself, that such a miserable death was ready to overtake them. And if this curse could not be the effect of his angry imprecation, then his cursing them is no proof, that he spake in a peevish and revengeful spirit; unless we will suppose, that, tho he had no power in himself to destroy them, yet as a prophet he had this power given him of God to destroy whomsoever he pleased. But surely every one must see this to be highly absurd, upon the least reflexion.

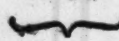
reflexion. The power of cutting men off by SERM.
an untimely death was never lodged in the VII.
hands of any prophet, that he might use it
at his own pleasure, and to gratify his private
resentments. If this was so, I would ask,
Why neither Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, nor
any other of the prophets exerted it, when
they were as much provoked, and even worse
treated in their own persons, than Elisha was
at this time? And as God gave the prophets
no such power, but reserved it in his own
hands; so the scripture never represents him
exerting it purely to gratify a morose humor,
and accomplish a revengeful wish of any
prophet. No man, who attends to the scrip-
ture notion of the supreme Being, to that
account it gives of his universal providence,
and his government of the Jewish nation;
or only reflects on the history of Jonah, and
the answer Christ gave to the sons of Zebe-
dee, can once imagine, that he will destroy
the lives of men to please a peevish prophet:
but then uses his power, where it is not only
in strictness just, but necessary to answer the
wise and good ends of his government. Since
then the prophet's curse would have had no
effect, if it had proceeded from a peevish,
angry spirit; we have no just cause from his
cursing them to suspect, that he was agitated
by any evil and furious passion. Nor does
the phrase oblige us to think, that the good
man was out of temper, when he cursed
these idolatrous youths; for blessing and cur-
sing

SERM. VII.  sing have three significations in scripture. He blesses, who confers a blessing, which is the prerogative of almighty God; or who wishes a blessing, which it is in the power of all men to do; or pronounces a blessing in the name of God, and this is the office of a prophet. In this last sense Balaam, who was hired and disposed to curse the children of Israel, is said to have blessed them; because he uttered those blessings, which God extorted from him against his inclination. In like manner to curse signifies to inflict a curse, as God cursed the earth after the fall; to wish a curse, as Shimei cursed David; or to pronounce and foretel a curse, which is coming upon men for their sins, in which sense our prophet cursed these children of Bethel. The prophets are said to do, what they predict, or denounce by divine authority. God says to Jeremiah, ch. i. 10. *See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant:* not surely, because he was to do all this himself, but because God would reveal his will to him, and enable him to declare, what nations he would root out and destroy. Elisha therefore might be said to curse these children, because, as a prophet, he denounced a curse against them; tho he was so far from being peevish and exasperated, that he was mild and compassionate. For did not the blessed Jesus most compassionately weep over Jerusalem

Jerusalem at the same time that he foretold SERM.
those dreadful calamities, which were coming VII.
upon the people for their impenitency. Luke
xix. 41,—44. And if this be most consistent
with his character as a prophet, and the original
word will bear this construction, as undoubtedly
it will, we ought to choose the most favorable
sense. And that no other sense can be put upon
it, will appear from the next thing proposed,
which is to shew,

IV. THAT Elisha as a prophet only foretold
and denounced a curse, which by the spirit of
prophecy he knew was coming upon them.

THE historian plainly says, he cursed
them in the name of the Lord^a; or, as a
prophet, denounced a curse, which God
would inflict upon them for their apostasy
from him, and their attachment to idols.
To speak in the name of God is to deliver
what he commands. To prophesy in his
name is to foretel things, which he reveals
to the prophets, and commands them to
predict. Jer. xxvi. 9. Thus to curse in his
name is to declare a curse, which he has
determined to inflict, and authorised the
prophet to denounce. Elijah may be said
to curse the captain and his soldiers, when
he spoke to them in these words: *If I am
a man of God, fire will come down from
heaven, and destroy thee, and thy fifty.* The words
O of

SERM. of our prophet are not related by the historian, but when it is said in general, that he
 VII.  cursed them in the name of the Lord, it plainly shews, that he acted as a minister of the supreme ruler of the world, and by his order pronounced, and foretold the curse in some such words as these, If I am a prophet of the true God, or if the God of Israel be the true God, two bears will come out of the wood, and destroy many of you. And if he thus spoke as a prophet, what reason is there to imagine, that he was moved by an inordinate passion, or intemperate zeal? When the prophets of God predicted any calamity, which was coming upon their own, or upon other countries, they did not wish evil to the people, nor desire their ruin; but were grieved for their sins and calamities, and only declared by the command, and in the name of God, what he had decreed to send upon them for their sins. That Elifha spoke the truth, and truly declared what was revealed to him of God, when he cursed them in the name of the Lord, is clear, because the event followed; for if he had cursed them in his passion only, and not by the command of God, it would not have come to pass; since, as I have shewn, he had no power to inflict a curse, and God would not send it to gratify an evil passion. We may compare this event with the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who were swallowed up alive by the gaping earth, for
 3 rebeling

rebeling against the divine appointment declared by Moses. Tho Moses was displeased with them, yet he did not of himself imprecate, and bring this miserable end upon them; but only denounced, what he knew God would inflict, as appears from his words compared with the context; and foretold it, that all the people might be assured of his divine mission, and know that Korah, and his company, did evil in resisting his authority. *And Moses said, Hereby shall ye know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works: for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.* Numb. xvi. 28—30, compared with ver. 23, and 31, 32. No more did our prophet destroy these young Bethelites by an angry imprecation, which was impossible, but only denounced what it was the will of God to inflict; which leads me to shew,

V. THAT this evil, considered as a judgment of God, was justly and wisely inflicted upon these young idolaters.

THERE came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

SERM. *them.* This was a terrible slaughter indeed,
 VII. and which many circumstances might con-
 ~~~~~ cur to make so great, which it was not ne-  
 cessary to relate, and cannot be known at  
 present. We have all heard of events, which  
 seemed incredible at first, till we were better  
 apprised of the particular circumstances. As  
 to this case, the bears might perhaps have  
 whelps, and for that and other causes be  
 more ravenous after their prey than usual;  
 and surprise these youths without any wea-  
 pons to defend themselves, in a narrow way,  
 where they could not easily make their  
 escape. The sudden fright which seized  
 them, and the consciousness of their guilt,  
 awakened by the denunciation of the pro-  
 phet, might throw their minds into the ut-  
 most confusion, and hinder their flight.  
 They were likewise, it is probable, at such  
 a distance from Bethel, that when these  
 devouring creatures had killed some, they  
 might overtake others, before they could  
 reach the city, and secure themselves from  
 their greedy jaws. And if their destroying  
 so many of these children was only permitted  
 of God, yet, as it was foretold by Elisha, it  
 shewed him to be a true prophet; but is no  
 greater objection against religion than other  
 such disasters, which frequently happen in  
 the world, and which it is not my business  
 to consider at present. But if we well reflect  
 upon the several circumstances of the narra-  
 tive, it will appear reasonable to conclude,  
 that



that there was an overruling hand of God in SERM,  
it; and that he who has power over all be- VII.  
ings, living and inanimate, directed the two  
bears to fall upon these young idolaters; for  
we are told it was in the highway, where  
such savage creatures had not used to come,  
and where persons walked with safety. How-  
ever in this view I choose to consider it,  
because this alone is attended with any  
considerable difficulty: and I doubt not but  
that when all circumstances are fairly weigh-  
ed, it will appear a just and wise punish-  
ment, in no respect unworthy of God.

HE gives all men their being, and has an  
unalienable claim to their obedience; and as  
their serving him is rewarded with many  
great blessings in this life, so he has a right  
to punish their disobedience, either in order  
to reclaim the offenders, or to warn other  
persons. Now idolatry is the highest act of  
disobedience, for it leads men to deny him,  
and violate his laws; to give his honor to  
beings, who have no divine power, and in-  
troduces many superstitious and impure rites.  
He may therefore justly punish idolaters, be-  
cause they act not according to the duty of  
creatures; but renounce their allegiance to  
him, that faith in him, which is the first  
principle of a virtuous life. And tho he  
mercifully bore with those people, who  
gave into idolatry, and did not immediately  
chastise them for their impieties; yet this  
did not infringe his right to punish them,  
O 3 and

SERM. and he often made use of it, as appears from

VII. the history of those nations. But the worship  
 of idols was a greater crime in the Jews, to  
 whom he had manifested himself by many  
 wonderful works, and acts of special kindness; whom he had taken under his more  
 immediate government, and given them an  
 excellent institution of religion, with a view  
 to preserve them from idolatry. And if their  
 sin was more aggravated on these accounts,  
 it was fit they should be punished according  
 to their demerits. Among the Jews, none  
 were at this time more worthy of punishment  
 than the Bethelites, because their city  
 was the fountain and metropolis of idolatry;  
 where Jeroboam had erected his calf, and  
 established his priests, in defiance of the divine  
 laws, and for mean, political views. When  
 therefore this wicked prince first sacrificed to  
 his idol, God sent a prophet to protest against  
 his altar, and the king put forth his hand from  
 the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his  
 hand which he put forth against him, dried up,  
 so that he could not pull it in again to him.  
 But the man of God, at the intreaty of the king,  
 besought the Lord, and the king's hand was  
 restored to him again, and became as it was  
 before. By these two miracles God gave them  
 an early and gracious warning against this new  
 idolatry, but they disregarding it, were governed  
 by the example and authority of the king. And  
 these young persons were undoubtedly some

of the worst idolaters, because they went out SERM.  
contemptuously to mock the prophet of the VII.  
true God. And as our blessed Lord says to  
his disciples, *He that despiseth you, despiseth  
me: and he that despiseth me, despiseth him  
that sent me;* so they, who mocked Elisha,  
as a worshiper and prophet of God, affronted  
God who sent him, and were therefore most  
fit to be made examples of his justice. He  
punished them, you see, who most deserved  
punishment. And the man, who will ven-  
ture to say this judgment was not just, must  
shew, that the great Lord and Sovereign of  
the world has no just claim to the obedience  
of his subjects, and no right to punish those,  
who impiously violate his laws. But if it  
be allowed, as certainly it must, that he has  
this right; who is to judge, when it ought  
to be used, and where the evil must fall,  
finite mortals, or he who is perfectly wise?  
If wise and good governors may justly cut  
off irreclamable offenders, in order to deter  
others from those crimes, which are incon-  
sistent with the public good; surely the su-  
preme ruler and judge of the world has a  
right to destroy irreclamable sinners, that  
they may do no farther mischief, and others  
may take warning by their miserable end.

BUT further, as this punishment was just,  
so it was wisely inflicted. The end of other  
punishments is to reform the offenders them-  
selves; but the end of capital punishments is  
to reform others, that they may not be ruin-



SERM,ed by following bad examples. The punish-

VII. ment we are considering was properly directed, and fell upon the right persons, in order to produce amendment in their surviving relations and neighbours. For it was inflicted upon some of the inhabitants of that city, where the image of the calf was erected; upon them, who in the vanity of their hearts were offering contempt to the prophet, name, and worship of the true God; upon children, that their parents might not only be admonished to reform themselves, but also to educate their children in his fear. This sad calamity therefore was proper to convince them, that he was the true God, whom their fathers had worshiped, in whose name Elisha denounced this curse; to induce them, if they would consider, to renounce their idolatry at the warning of the prophet; lest some greater evil should overtake them, if they persisted in their sins. And tho so many were destroyed, that this event might more effectually awaken this stupid people; yet several escaped to make it known through all the town and country, that this great judgment was denounced by Elisha in the name of the true God. For these words, *And tare forty and two children of them,* plainly declare that there were others in the company, who were spared to carry a true account into the city, that the inhabitants might repent of their idolatry, and turn to God.

THUS

THUS have I shewn, that these were not SERM.  
innocent little children, who mocked Elisha VII.  
for his baldness only, out of mere wanton-  
ness; but young persons, who from their  
own evil disposition derided him, because he  
was a prophet of the true God, from whom  
they had apostatised; that Elisha did not  
with this untimely end to them in revenge,  
but denounced it as a prophet; and that if  
we suppose this to have been a punishment  
inflicted upon them for their sins, it will ap-  
pear very just and wise to those, who duly  
consider the time, place, and persons; how  
proper it was to shew the people of Israel the  
sin of their idolatry, and to recover them to  
the fear and worship of the true God. And  
now I dare appeal to every ingenuous person,  
whether it is not more reasonable, consider-  
ing the character of Elisha as a prophet, to-  
gether with the true sense of the words; to  
suppose, that the scripture represents him as  
foretelling and denouncing this calamity, be-  
cause he knew by the spirit of prophecy,  
that God would inflict it; than to conceive,  
that the wisest and best Being sent it upon  
them, because the prophet wished it from his  
own resentment and anger. This history  
being thus rightly understood affords the fol-  
lowing useful reflexions.

1. THE sin and danger of scoffing at re-  
ligion, and making a mock of sacred things,  
are very great. These idolatrous youths did  
not deride Elisha only, but true religion like-  
wise;

SERM. wise; and therefore this calamity came upon  
 VII. them, rather than upon others in the same  
 city. The judgment inflicted proves the sin  
 to be very great. Scoffing at religion indeed  
 is not always punished in this world, but the  
 sin must be always very offensive to God:  
 and the end of this and such judgments, inflicted under the theocracy of the Jews, was  
 both to shew them in the most sensible manner how great this sin is in his sight; and to  
 be a standing warning to all, who read them. Religion is the most important concern, and  
 ought to be thought and discoursed of with great seriousness and reverence; and it will  
 better become unbelievers to inquire honestly into the truth of it, than to make it the subject  
 of their jests and drollery. It is neither modest, nor decent to deride that, which the  
 greater part of mankind esteem to be, and is really in itself, the most serious thing in the  
 world; and besides the sinfulness, and indecency of it, it is always a punishment to itself.  
 For they, who give themselves up to a vain and ludicrous spirit, and make a practice  
 of bantering sacred things, are indisposed for serious examination, and neglect the means  
 of conviction: so that instead of coming to know better, they contract an incurable aversion  
 to religion. The wise man has long since observed this: *The scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not*, Prov. xiv. 6. This  
 being the unhappy consequence of scoffing at religion, that it hardens men in unbelief  
 and



and vice; we cannot but think it will some-  
time be punished by that great Being, who  
governs the world, and would have all men  
believe the doctrines, and obey the pre-  
cepts of true religion. No man therefore  
should presume to scoff at religion, lest he  
thereby incur the greater guilt and punish-  
ment. And here it may not be improper to  
caution every one not to turn such passages  
of scripture, as our text, into ridicule; nor  
to give any regard to them, who profanely  
exercise their wit this way. If they do not  
understand such places, and see not the rea-  
son of the divine conduct; must they in-  
stantly break their jests upon them? Are  
they omniscient? Can nothing be fit to be  
done, but what they apprehend and judge  
to be right? And if such places can be well  
accounted for; will they not have cause to  
be ashamed, and to reflect upon their con-  
duct with remorse? Wherefore let them  
who have any modesty, or regard their own  
safety, take care not to exercise their drollery  
upon any part of the Bible.

2. PARENTS should be careful to educate  
their children in true religion. The parents  
of these young men were Jews, who had  
the law of the true God; but gave into ido-  
latry, and trained up their children in the  
contempt of his worship. Hence came this  
sad calamity upon their offspring, and in  
consequence upon themselves. Such judg-  
ments indeed do not now fall upon children,  
who

SERM.  
VII.

SERM. who are brought up in irreligion and wickedness; but yet they must suffer many evils, which are the natural consequences of their vitious actions. Nay many, who run into profaneness and vice through the example, or even neglect of their parents to give them good instruction betimes, are brought to sad and untimely ends: but if they escape these, they are exposed to everlasting destruction, which is unspeakably worse. It is therefore the great concern of parents to bring up their children in true piety; and as they should not train them up in false principles and vitious courses, so they should be very careful that they do not give into them, through their neglect. This will be to the disadvantage of true religion, which must be maintained and propagated by the profession of particular persons, and consequently the fewer profess it, the faster it must decline. Nor will it be less hurtful to their children. For surely it is not indifferent, what men believe; but the more pure and scriptural their faith is, the better effect it will have upon their manners and true happiness. If parents then have any love to their children, any regard to religion, any desire to discharge their duty well, that they may render a good account of their trust hereafter; let them see that their children err not from the ways of true piety through their fault, but are trained up therein by seasonable instructions and a good example.

3. CHILDREN are from hence instructed S E R M.  
not to follow the evil example of their pa- VII.  
rents. They should sincerely endeavour to  
form their judgment and govern their actions  
by the laws of their Creator, made known  
either by reason or revelation. And if their  
parents require them to act contrary to his  
will, or set them a bad example, they should  
remember, that they ought to obey God  
their heavenly Father, before their earthly  
parents. They should indeed behave with  
due reverence towards their parents, and not  
differ from them without just cause; but  
yet they ought to consider, that their con-  
sciences are bound by a superior law, and  
therefore should not comply with them in a  
known opposition to the will of God. How  
great an inducement soever the example and  
command of their parents may be, it cannot  
excuse them in wilfully violating the laws of  
their blessed Creator. We should call no  
man father upon earth; that is, we should  
not have more regard to his authority, even  
tho he be our father, than we have to the  
will of God. We should love and honor our  
parents, but we should not love them more  
than Christ; nor pay more regard to their  
will, than we do to his commands. *He that  
loveth father or mother more than me, says  
Christ, is not worthy of me: he is neither  
worthy to be called my disciple, nor to injoy  
my favor. Matt. x. 37.* Children therefore  
should rather in a reverent and becoming  
manner



SERM. VII. manner dissent from their parents, than follow them in an evil way: for if they imitate their vices, they must expect likewise to have a share in their punishment. It was the unhappy case of these young men to be trained up in idolatry by their parents, and we see what they brought upon themselves by treading in their steps, and imbibing their hatred against the prophet of the true God. And tho' such dreadful judgments do not always light upon children, who follow their parents in the ways of irreligion, and vice; yet they should remember, that wickedness is inevitably attended with many bad effects here, and that there will be a day of retribution, in which God will render to every man according to his works.

FINALLY, let us all fear God, and keep his commandments, that we may happily escape both the present and future evils, which are the natural consequence and just punishment of disobedience; and may enjoy as well those present pleasures as those eternal blessings, which are the result and reward of true piety. Amen.



SERMON



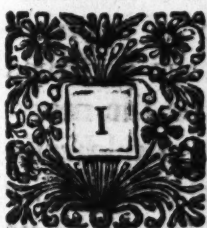
## S E R M O N VIII.

Faith a reasonable condition of salvation.

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JOHN iii. 36.

*He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

N discoursing of unbelief I S E R M. VIII.  
observed, that the goodness  
of God in creating mankind,  
and sending Jesus Christ to  
save them from their sins,  
may give us just reason to  
conclude, that he will shut none out of  
heaven for any thing, but what does in it-  
self render them incapable of it; or is the  
cause of their living in those vices, which  
must inevitably have this sad effect. And  
for the same reasons we may rest assured,  
that he will not make any thing the con-  
dition

SERM. dition of our salvation by his Son, but what  
 VIII. is necessary to prepare us for it, as all moral  
 virtues are; or at some times, and in some  
 circumstances, is necessary to engage us to  
 the practice of that holiness, without which  
 we cannot see the Lord. And with this  
 view at least we may suppose, this faith is  
 required, to which all the blessings of the  
 world to come are promised in the text.  
 He, who believeth, is said to have everlasting  
 life, because he shall certainly possess it,  
 if he perseveres. The sacred writers frequently  
 speak in this manner to denote the  
 certainty of the event predicted, or the promise  
 made. Isaiah ix. 6. *For unto us a child  
 is born, unto us a son is given, and the go-  
 vernment shall be upon his shoulder.* But per-  
 haps when the Baptist here uses the present  
 tense, he may only intend, that he who be-  
 lieveth hath a right to eternal life; for some-  
 times the right to a possession is expressed  
 by the word, which signifies the possession  
 itself. And this may seem to be the mean-  
 ing of Christ himself, John v. 24. *Verily,  
 verily I say unto you, He that beareth my  
 word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath  
 everlasting life, and shall not come into condem-  
 nation; but is passed from death unto life.* But  
 however this be, whether they speak of the  
 right every true believer hath to eternal life,  
 or of the certainty of his possessing it in case  
 of perseverance, faith in Christ is plainly  
 made a condition of our injoying this in-  
 estimable



estimable blessing. The same condition of SERM.  
salvation was proposed to the Gentiles by his VIII.  
order. Mark xvi. 15, 16. *And he said unto*  
*them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the*  
*gospel to every creature. He that believeth*  
*and is baptized, shall be saved.* Accordingly  
when they preached Jesus to them, they  
promised salvation by him to those only,  
who believed. *Believe on the Lord Jesus*  
*Christ,* said Paul and Silas to the Jailer, *and*  
*thou shalt be saved, and thy house,* Acts xvi.  
31. But that faith is made one condition  
of injoying eternal blessedness to them, who  
have heard the gospel of Christ, is acknow-  
ledged on all hands. And if it should be  
asked, Why is so much stress laid on faith  
in the business of salvation? the reasonable-  
ness of this will, I hope, sufficiently ap-  
pear, when I have explained from these  
words,

- I. THE nature of that faith, to which  
eternal life is promised in the gospel.
- II. THE reasons, for which this faith is re-  
quired, and made one of the terms of  
salvation by Jesus Christ.

BEFORE I enter upon these heads, I can-  
not but observe, that the state of those times,  
in which the blessed Jesus appeared, may di-  
rect us in forming a just notion of these things.  
The gospel was first preached to Jews and  
P Gentiles,

SERM. Gentiles, who had not only been trained up  
 VIII. in other religions, but were then also very  
 { much corrupted in their judgment and man-  
 ners. They had extremely degenerated from  
 those laws of God, under which they lived.  
 The Jews, tho exact in observing their tra-  
 ditionary rites, omitted the weightier matters  
 of the law, and freely gave themselves up  
 to the worst of immoralities. The Gentiles  
 did not only worship a multitude of idols,  
 but were sunk into the lowest degree of ig-  
 norance and vice. They both therefore were  
 called upon by the gospel to reform their  
 sentiments and practice, which could not be  
 done, unless they believed in Jesus Christ.  
 And from hence we may understand,

I. THE nature of that faith, to which  
 eternal life is promised in the gospel. For,

I. IT is supposed that those, to whom  
 the gospel is preached, do not inconsiderate-  
 ly reject, but honestly inquire into the truth  
 of the christian institution. Tho it is ever  
 so clearly proposed to them, and supported  
 by the most rational evidences, they may  
 either be so far influenced by their precon-  
 ceived opinions, and their indulged customs,  
 as to refuse to examine it; or may set them-  
 selves to examine it from a sincere desire to  
 be informed of the will of God. Our bles-  
 sed Lord did not require the Jews to believe  
 in him implicitly, or to take things upon  
 his word without inquiry; but exhorted  
 them

them to search the scriptures, and to com- SERM.  
pare his doctrine and miracles with the pre- VIII.  
dictions of the prophets, in order to judge,   
whether they were accomplished in him.

John v. 39. *Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they, which testify of me.* And they, who believed in him, were convinced by reflecting upon his doctrine and miracles.

The Samaritans, who were inclined to have a good opinion of him, by what their neighbour said, when they heard him themselves, were fully persuaded, by the excellency of his doctrine, that he was the Messias. John iv. 41. *And many more believed, because of his own word: And said unto the woman, Now we believe not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.* The goodness of his doctrine it was,

which induced his disciples to believe in him. John vi. 68. *Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.* The officers themselves, who were sent to apprehend him, were so taken with his discourses, that they were inclined to believe in him, and returned without executing their orders against him. John vii. 45, 46. *Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.* Nor were believers only convinced, that his



SERM. doctrine was worthy of God in itself; but,  
 VIII. by regarding his miracles with due attention,  
 were also satisfied, that his commission was  
 from God. John ii. 23. *Now when he was  
 in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day,  
 many believed on his name, when they saw the  
 miracles, which he did.* Nicodemus likewise  
 came to Jesus by night, and said unto him,  
*Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come  
 from God: for no man can do these miracles,  
 which thou doest, except God be with him,*  
 ch. iii. 2. We read also that another time,  
*Many of the people believed on him, and said,  
 When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles  
 than these, which this man hath done?* ch.  
 vii. 31. The faith therefore of them, who  
 believed in him, was not an inconsiderate and  
 rash credulity: but they examined his doc-  
 trine, and reflected maturely upon his mira-  
 cles, before they believed. The faith like-  
 wise of them, whom he commended, was  
 founded on a rational conviction, as appears  
 from every instance; but I shall only at pre-  
 sent allege that of the centurion. He rea-  
 soned with himself, that if he bid his ser-  
 vants go, and they went; Jesus, who had so  
 much power over diseases, could command  
 the distemper to leave his servant, and it  
 would depart from him, tho he was at a  
 great distance. The faith of the Bereans,  
 recorded with honor in the scriptures, was  
 the result of a diligent and impartial search  
 after truth. *These were more noble than those*

*in Thessalonica, in that they received the word* SERM.  
*with all readiness of mind, and searched the* VIII.  
*scriptures daily, whether those things were so,* ~~~~~

Acts xvii. 11. And among the Gentiles, they who believed were such, as were disposed to inquire into the reasonableness of the doctrine concerning eternal life, preached by the apostles; and did not instantly reject it, because it was contrary to their former conceptions. For this is the sense of those words of St. Luke in the Acts: *And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed,* ch. xiii. 48.

2. MOREOVER it is supposed, that when they are convinced of the truth of Christianity by attending to the evidences of it, they assent to it with all their hearts and affections. Nothing is more certain than this, that men do not always follow the light of their understanding, and act according to the conviction of their consciences. As in matters of practice, they may act inconsiderately, or make use of that power, which they have to forbear acting, till they are satisfied of the lawfulness of a thing; and when they plainly see their duty, may be overpowered by custom, or led by interest to act contrary to their knowledge: so likewise in matters of faith, when truth is proposed to them, they may either judge rashly through prejudice, inadvertency, and other causes, or may suspend their judgment till they have well considered; and even

SERM. when they perceive on which side the truth  
VIII. lies, they may resist and stifle their convictions. As they may fairly inquire, or obstinately refuse to examine; so may they either heartily imbrace the truth, when they perceive it, or act contrary to their inward persuasion from a base regard to their present interest and conveniency. There were some in the apostolical times, who resisted their convictions, till they wore off, as well as others, who wilfully neglected and opposed the means of information. They did not openly assent to the truth, when they were inwardly convinced, but for the love of ease, riches, and honor, turned their thoughts from it, till their convictions were lost, and their understanding darkened. The christian religion does not only contain a body of divine truths; as, that there is but one God, and one Lord Jesus Christ; that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a future state of rewards and punishments: but also prescribes a body of divine laws for the government of our actions towards ourselves, our neighbour, and our Creator. And therefore some men, tho they plainly perceived the truth, yet would not profess it, because they would not resolve to leave their sinful customs, and live according to the precepts of Christ. When eternal life therefore is promised to believing, it is supposed that they, who perceive the truth of Christianity, do not resist and stifle their convictions  
from



from bad motives, but are pleased when they discern it, and receive it with all their affections. When the Eunuch desired to be baptized, *Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayst*, Acts viii. 37. And St. Paul says that, *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness*. True faith therefore implies a sincere assent and love to the truth, as well as the illumination of the understanding, and conviction of the judgment.

3. TRUE faith does not only include an hearty assent to the truth of the christian institution upon reasonable grounds, but also an open profession of it before men. That Jesus Christ requires all, who believe in him, to make a public profession of his religion, as a proper evidence of their faith, and a necessary means to spread and preserve it in the world for the good of mankind, is certain from his appointing two solemn rites, by which it is manifested, baptism and the Lord's supper. By baptism we solemnly declare our belief in Jesus Christ, and oblige ourselves to live according to his laws. *For as many of you, says St. Paul to the Galatians, as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ*, ch. iii. 27. By being baptized in his name they professed, that he was their only lawgiver; and publicly declared, that they formed their judgment, and governed their actions by his doctrines and laws, and not by the institution of

SERM. Moses. That profession of faith in Jesus  
 VIII. Christ, which is made at baptism, is sta-  
 tedly renewed at the Lord's supper. And  
 therefore the same apostle tells the Corin-  
 thians, *For as often as ye eat this bread, and  
 drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death  
 till he come,* 1 Epist. xi. 26. And that a  
 sincere assent of the mind cannot be suffi-  
 ciently demonstrated without an open pro-  
 fession, is plain from his words in another  
 place: *For with the mouth, confession is made  
 unto salvation,* Rom. x. 10. Now an open  
 profession of Christ could not be made in  
 that, and the next succeeding times, without  
 a sincere love to truth, and a deliberate re-  
 solution to suffer for a good conscience. For  
 all, who would then live godly in Jesus  
 Christ, must suffer persecution; being ex-  
 posed to divers reproaches and calumnies, to  
 various losses and disappointments, to many  
 cruel and painful sufferings, and even to se-  
 veral violent and ignominious deaths. Thus  
 to renounce the advantages and honors of this  
 life, to surmount the fear of all present evils,  
 what could it be, but the effect of a firm  
 and unshaken trust in God, as well as of a  
 brave contempt of the present world? Be-  
 lievers, who could so contentedly deny them-  
 selves all the pleasures, emoluments, and ho-  
 nors, which they might have enjoyed here,  
 and so courageously bear the greatest hard-  
 ships, must stedfastly rely on the truth of  
 all the promises of God in the gospel; that  
 if

if they acted according to their light, and obeyed the truth from their hearts, his grace would never be wanting to them, but they should be firmly supported here with inward consolations, and hereafter gloriously rewarded with eternal rest. By their faith therefore they gained a complete victory over this world, being influenced by it to despise all the fading glories of it in comparison of their duty, and to suffer cheerfully in hope of a blessed resurrection. They could even rejoice in those tribulations they suffered for their holy profession. *And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the holy Ghost, 1 Thess. i. 6.* And if we impartially consider the state of the first believers in Christ, we shall be convinced, that they far surpassed the most renowned heroes in the firmness of their resolution, their fearless courage in facing the most terrifying evils, and their invincible patience in bearing the greatest cruelties.

4. FURTHERMORE that faith, which has the promise of eternal life, is not only supposed to procede from a rational conviction, and to be manifested by an open profession; but also to have a proper and suitable effect upon the lives of men. In them, who first believed, it produced a godly sorrow for their past iniquities, and led them to forsake their evil ways. Nothing indeed could be more effectual to awaken men to consideration,

SERM.  
VIII.



SERM. fideration, and ingage them to repentance,

VIII. *than the denunciation in the gospel against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, together with the gracious promise of pardon made to all true penitents, whatsoever their past transgressions had been. When they believed the threats of God, and saw the tendency of sin to make them miserable hereafter, they reformed their sinful courses in hope of that forgiveness and salvation, which was offered to them in Jesus Christ. Men were not therefore only exhorted to believe, but to repent also in consequence of their believing. Mark i. 14, 15. Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. And at another time he said, I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me, should not abide in darkness, John xii. 46. The Gentiles, by believing in Jesus, were turned from their foolish idolatries, and purified from their vicious customs; as St. Peter said, God put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith, Acts xv. 9. Another effect of this faith was a sincere obedience to all the commandments of Christ, to which they solemnly obliged themselves, who were baptized in his name. True faith in Christ is always described by its effects, and supposed*

posed to be the principle of a holy life. Gal. SERM.  
 v. 6. *For in Jesus Christ, neither circum-* VIII.  
*cision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision,*  
*but faith which worketh by love.* And St.  
 Paul says to Timothy, 1 Epist. i. 5. *Now*  
*the end of the commandment is charity, out of*  
*a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of*  
*faith unfeigned.* That the faith, to which  
 eternal life is promised, includes obedience,  
 is plain, because this is the very end, for  
 which it is required. Rom. i. 5. *By whom*  
*we have received grace and apostleship for obe-*  
*dience to the faith among all nations for his*  
*name.* To the same purpose are these words  
 in the close of this epistle, ch. xvi. 26. *But*  
*now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of*  
*the prophets, according to the commandment of*  
*the everlasting God, made known to all nations*  
*for the obedience of faith.* The sense of both  
 which places plainly is, that the gracious  
 purpose of God to save the Gentiles, as well  
 as the Jews by Jesus Christ, was declared by  
 the preaching of the gospel to all nations,  
 that they might believe in him, and be in-  
 gaged by their faith to obey his holy institu-  
 tion. The remission of sins therefore, and  
 eternal life are not promised to such a feeble  
 assent to the truth of Christianity, as pro-  
 duces no good effects, and answers not the  
 end of believing. And this is very plain  
 also from the terms of salvation by Jesus  
 Christ, which are not to be collected from  
 some places only, but from the whole tenor  
 of

SERM. of the new Testament. Those places, in  
 VIII. which a good life in general, or the several  
 virtues thereof are required, shew us what  
 effect our faith must have, in order to give  
 us a right to the pardon of sin, and the joys  
 of the world to come. Our Lord pronoun-  
 ces, *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they  
 shall see God*, Matt. v. 8. And the author  
 of the epistle to the Hebrews directs us to  
*Follow peace with all men and holiness, without  
 which no man shall see the Lord*, ch. xii. 14.  
 When remission of sins is promised to them,  
 who believe, Acts x. 43; it is to be ex-  
 plained by those places, in which they are  
 also commanded to repent and be converted,  
 Acts v. 19. When St. Paul says, Acts xiii.  
 39. *And by him all that believe are justified  
 from all things, from which ye could not be  
 justified by the law of Moses*; his words are  
 to be expounded by those of St. James, ch.  
 ii. 21—24. *Was not Abraham our father  
 justified by works, when he had offered Isaac  
 his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith  
 wrought with his works, and by works was  
 faith made perfect? And the scripture was  
 fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God,  
 and it was imputed unto him for righteous-  
 ness: and he was called the friend of God.*  
*Ye see then how that by works a man is justi-  
 fied, and not by faith only: not by believing  
 in Christ only, but by such a faith, as pro-  
 duces a sincere conformity to his precepts.*  
 They, who come not up to these terms, will  
 be

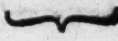


be rejected, notwithstanding their belief and S E R M. profession of Christianity. For Christ says, VIII. Matt. vii. 21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* These, who shall not enter into heaven, did not want faith, for they called Jesus Lord; but they were unfruitful in the christian profession, and on this account were rejected, as persons unfit for heaven. And it is really wonderful, that any Christians can so far forget these and many other places in their Bible, as to lay so much stress on faith, as even to speak meanly of those good works, which God has ordained, that we should walk in them, and without which, faith is dead and unprofitable. James ii. 19. *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* Wheresoever therefore justification and eternal life are promised to them, who believe; in such places faith includes the genuine effects of it, as the fear and love of God are considered as principles of obedience, when his favor is promised to them. We may say of faith, what Christ and St. John speak of love. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that believeth in me,* John xiv. 21. *For this is faith in Jesus Christ, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous,*

SERM. *grievous*, 1 John v. 3. For this reason faith

VIII. sometimes stands for the whole christian religion; as in those places, where St. Paul disputes against the Jews concerning the way of salvation in his epistles to the Romans, and Galatians. To give one instance only from the former of these epistles, he says, ch. iii. 28. *Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.* In which words he maintains against the Judaizers, that the christian religion is a sufficient means of salvation without the ceremonial law. He, who so effectually believes in Jesus Christ, as to live according to his institution, shall be accepted with God, tho he observe not the law of Moses. From the whole it is clear, that faith in Jesus Christ is such a firm persuasion concerning the truth of his religion, as is founded on a reasonable evidence, and is manifested by an open profession, and a holy life. As that unbelief, for which men will be condemned, includes a wilful disobedience to the gospel: so that faith, which gives men a right to pardon and salvation, comprehends a sincere obedience to the precepts of Christ, as a natural effect of a sincere assent to the truth of his doctrine. Having thus explained the nature of that faith, to which eternal life is promised, I come to shew,

II. THE

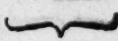
II. THE reasons, for which this faith is SERM.  
required, and made one condition of salva- VIII.  
tion by Christ. And, 

I. FAITH considered in this view is a moral virtue, commendable in itself, and fit to be rewarded. For as almighty God, who has brought us into being, and placed us here in a state of probation for another world, has indowed us with reason, that we may be capable of discerning between notions true and false, and between actions good and evil; so it must be his will, that we should make a good use of our rational faculties, and take proper care to furnish our minds with useful knowledge; that we should be sincere lovers of truth, and endeavour to form a right judgment in those things, which concern our true and everlasting happiness. It cannot be in itself an indifferent thing, what notions we entertain in matters of religion; for as they are true or false, they must have a very different effect upon our conduct and happiness. Those, which are true, can only, in their own tendency, lead us to actions, which are good, and necessary to our happiness; whereas those, which are false, may lead us to actions, which are evil, and inconsistent with our good. This might be illustrated and confirmed by divers instances; but as time will not permit, I shall only observe, that as God is a lover of truth and righteousness, and really desires, that all men  
I should



SERM. should be virtuous and happy; so he will

VIII. undoubtedly be displeased with them, who  
 { have no regard to truth, nor just concern  
 for their own real happiness; but will ap-  
 prove them, who take care to form a true  
 judgment of things, and are mindful of  
 their chiefest good. To have no love to  
 truth, to be unconcerned about our notions  
 and happiness is morally evil, because we  
 make not that use of our intellectual powers,  
 which we ought to make, and which God  
 requires. On the other hand, it must be  
 one part of virtue to preserve in ourselves  
 a sincere love to truth, and to form a right  
 judgment in matters of faith and practice.  
 And in judging what we should believe,  
 we ought to regard the proper evidences of  
 truth, and should not be swayed by such  
 things, as are so far from being certain  
 marks of it, that they may lead us into the  
 worst of mistakes. And when persons have  
 more regard to truth, than to prevailing cus-  
 toms, and present interest; when they are  
 not governed by prejudice, but by evidence;  
 and setting themselves to inquire after true re-  
 ligion, imbrace that, which appears so to  
 them, upon the best inquiry they can make,  
 they act as becomes reasonable beings, and do  
 what is really virtuous. When Christ there-  
 fore, and his apostles, in the name of God,  
 required the Jews to leave their traditions,  
 the Gentiles their idolatry, both of them to  
 amend their lives, to worship the one living  
 and

and true God, and to govern themselves in SERM.  
all things according to his institution; and VIII.  
declared, that as they obeyed, or disobeyed   
this call, they should be punished with ever-  
lasting destruction, or blessed with eternal  
happiness in the world to come; and did  
such miracles before their faces, as were evi-  
dent acts of divine power, not only to a-  
waken their attention to those excellent rea-  
sonings they used, but also with a professed  
design to prove their mission from God, who  
could think himself unconcerned in this af-  
fair? What man could neglect to consider  
their doctrine, and persist in his former opi-  
nions and vices, without a criminal disre-  
gard to truth, and manifest neglect of his  
own welfare? And if the love of vice, and  
a mean regard to present things made him  
neglect those evidences, which were laid be-  
fore him; his fault was so much the greater  
and more aggravated. On the other hand,  
they acted the part of reasonable beings, of  
wise and good men, who did not reject the  
christian doctrine without examination; but  
having impartially considered it, notwith-  
standing all former prejudices, and being  
convinced of its truth, honestly followed  
the light of their consciences, and undaunt-  
edly professed the name of Jesus Christ at  
all hazards. Tho an implicit faith is of no  
worth, yet theirs, which proceeded from a  
right use of the understanding, and influ-  
enced their wills to choose what appeared  
 right

SERM. right to them, was truly virtuous. How-

VIII. ever education might bias them against the christian religion, or interest might tempt them to neglect it; yet they wisely determined to consider, and resolved to profess it upon due conviction, which was certainly an argument of a noble spirit, an action in itself good and praiseworthy. This faith therefore, which the gospel requires, is not a mere act of the understanding; but proceeds from a good use of the rational faculties, and a right determination of the will, and is therefore a moral virtue, good in itself, and fit to be rewarded. And I appeal to every man, whether it is not meet, that rational beings should make a good use of their understanding, in order to obtain the favor of the supreme intelligent Mind; and to live for ever with him in that blessed place, in which there is perfect knowledge to reward their love and search of truth, as well as perfect rectitude and felicity to reward their righteous actions and patient sufferings. Besides,

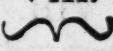
2. As this faith is good and rewardable in itself, considered as resulting from a moral use of the understanding and judgment; so it is necessary to that obedience, without which we cannot be saved. Tho it is an excellent virtue in a reasonable creature, yet it is not of itself sufficient for our salvation; as indeed no particular virtue is, unless it be attended with the practice of other virtues.

Faith



Faith is not required for its own sake alone, S E R M.  
but for the good effects it is necessary to VIII.  
produce. The design of Jesus Christ was   
to reform the world from that idolatry and  
wickedness, which universally prevailed; to  
teach men the knowledge and worship of  
the true God, and to engage them to the  
practice of all virtue upon the noblest prin-  
ciples of action. But how could this end  
be obtained without faith? If men believed  
not in the name of Christ, they would not  
obey his institution; but faith in him would  
lead them to keep his commandments. It  
was necessary therefore to answer the end of  
his coming, and was the first step to that re-  
formation, which he intended to make. And  
since it is not required as an assent to the  
truth only, but as an inward principle of  
obedience, without which, no regard to the  
authority of Jesus could be expected; is it  
not fit to make this one condition of our  
salvation, as well as that pure and spiritual  
worship of the living God, that universal  
benevolence and righteousness towards men,  
in a word, that conformity to the example  
and precepts of Christ, which the gospel re-  
quires, and which are its genuine effects?  
And if we consider the state both of Jews  
and Gentiles, when the blessed Jesus appear-  
ed, such a faith, as was founded upon rea-  
sonable evidence, and produced obedience to  
his laws, was absolutely necessary to their  
salvation. While they lived in those sins,  
Q 2which

SERM. which they were commanded to forsake,  
VIII. they were not capable of salvation; for  
which reason, they who believed not, are  
called children of disobedience, on whom  
the wrath of God cometh, Eph. v. 6. The  
ambition, covetousness, oppression, hypocri-  
fy, and other vices of the unbelieving Jews  
tended to put them out of the favor of  
God; nor less unhappy was the effect of  
those abominable idolatries, and vitious cus-  
toms, in which the Gentiles lived. I say  
not, that those Jews, who sincerely served  
God according to the law of Moses, or that  
those Gentiles, who obeyed the law of God  
written in their hearts, could not be accepta-  
ble to him here, and happy in the future  
state; but that the generality of them lived  
in such sins, as would exclude them from  
heaven; and therefore such a belief in Jesus  
Christ, as would purify them from these  
sins, was necessary to their salvation. On  
the other hand, those virtues, which they  
were called to practise by the gospel; that  
fear and love and worship of God; that  
charity and justice towards men; that pu-  
rity, temperance, and contentment, which  
our holy religion enjoins, were necessary to  
their present and future happiness, to pre-  
pare them for heaven, as well as to give  
them inward peace, and to make them re-  
spected and useful here. If it be necessary  
for men to forsake their sins, and to live  
well, that belief in Jesus, which produces  
these

these effects, must be necessary likewise. SERM.  
 True faith, as it is the principle of a holy VIII.  
 life, is, in the nature of things, necessary to   
 our salvation; and for this reason is so much  
 insisted on, and so indispensably required.  
 All sinners must from some principle or  
 other reform their manners, and live righteously, in order to obtain the favor of God. Before the coming of Christ how could men be acceptable to God, if from a sincere belief in him, as the great Creator and supreme Judge of the world, they did not abstain from sin and walk in righteousness of life? Justly therefore has the author of the epistle to the Hebrews observed the necessity of faith, when he says, *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, Heb. xi. 6. When therefore the greatest part of the world had departed from this first principle of true religion, and were enslaved to all manner of wickedness; and God was graciously pleased to send his Son Jesus Christ to reveal his will to men, and to die for their sins; to use the most proper methods to recover them from that miserable state to the knowledge, belief and worship of himself, and to the practice of virtue; how was it possible to please him without faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Christ therefore is required, because it is a necessary principle of obedience to the will



SERM. of God revealed in the gospel, and consequently fit to be made the condition of our admittance into his favor, and advancement to eternal life and glory. And if this be the nature of that faith, which the gospel requires, and these the reasons, why it is made a condition of our salvation by Jesus Christ, which I have explained; we may perceive,

I. THAT no objection can be reasonably offered against the christian religion on this account. Some unbelievers have vainly attempted to decry it for requiring faith, and promising forgiveness to the worst of sinners, if they would believe in Jesus Christ. If we were to judge by the discourses of these men, we might think that faith and believing were words never used by any persons, except Christians; and that faith in Jesus was a groundless credulity, such an empty assent to the truth of his doctrine, as produced no valuable effects. But what is faith properly speaking, but an assent to the truth of a proposition upon such evidence, as the nature of it admits? Do not our Deists themselves believe the existence of God, and the certainty of a future state on proper evidence? Do they not believe a great many other things upon such evidence, as they are capable of? When therefore Jesus came, and revealed to the world the true God, and did not only teach the most important truths, but likewise gave forth the  
most

most excellent precepts for holy living, was S E R M.  
it not reasonable to require belief in his VIII.  
doctrine, that men might be from thence  
induced to repent of their sins, and to live  
in subjection to his laws? The practice of  
holiness is the end of believing. And it is  
a gross and dishonest misrepresentation of  
our blessed Lord, to suppose, that he pro-  
mises forgiveness of sins, and life eternal to  
faith alone. He promises these blessings to  
them only, who reform their lives, and  
keep his commandments. If he had pro-  
mised them to such, as would profess his  
religion, however they lived, there would  
have been room to find fault; but it is cer-  
tain, that belief in him is required as the  
means of reformation, and that a good life  
is no less strictly required than faith. This  
objection therefore made by some unbe-  
lievers betrays great ignorance, or great  
malice; and an impartial man needs only  
open the new Testament, in order to be  
convinced, that it is false and groundless.

2. T H E christian religion gives no coun-  
tenance to that implicit faith, which the  
church of Rome demands. She sets up for  
infallibility, and expects that men should  
receive all her dictates as true, without exa-  
mination. Her members must not under-  
stand the reason of their faith, but blindly  
believe as the church believes. But let her  
be as infallible, as she can desire to be  
thought; why should men shut their eyes

SERM. in order to follow her guidance? Surely, if

VIII. she is infallible indeed, she can give them  
 such reasons, as will convince their judgment, and lead them after her with their eyes open. But what authority has she from scripture to require this blind, implicit faith and obedience? She cannot certainly have the face to pretend to greater infallibility, than Christ and his apostles; and yet they were so far from commanding men implicitly to believe in their words, that they exhorted them to search the scriptures, and to examine whether their doctrines were true. *Search the scriptures*, says Christ himself to the Jews, *for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me*, John v. 39. St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians, *Prove all things: hold fast that which is good*, 1 Epist. v. 21. And all Christians are directed by St. Peter; *And be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you; with meekness and fear*. The faith therefore, which the church of Rome demands, is mere credulity, without any reasonable conviction, and consequently has no virtue in it. Nor does she oblige men to believe her doctrines implicitly, because she can give them sufficient proofs of her infallibility; but because she is conscious to herself, that she has shamefully departed from the scriptures, and dreads a fair inquiry,



3. If the end of faith be the practice of S E R M. virtue, how unreasonable and absurd is it for VIII. Christians to persecute one another for their different opinions? We are to demonstrate the sincerity of our faith by the exercise of charity. But all the methods of persecution, whether they consist in depriving men of their just rights and privileges, or inflicting such evils upon them, as their persecutors have it in their power to inflict, are directly contrary to that love and goodness, by which Christ would have us shew ourselves to be his disciples; and therefore cannot be the fruits of true faith, but spring from pride, envy, covetousness, or some other worldly and unchristian principle. And what is that faith, which men would promote by the sly arts of defamation, or the more open methods of oppression and cruelty? It is only an assent to those particular doctrines, which they hold, and some of which perhaps have no foundation in the word of God. But that faith, which is the condition of our salvation by Jesus Christ, is such a firm persuasion concerning the truth of his religion in general, as inclines us to the practice of all christian virtues, particularly those of mutual forbearance and love. He therefore, who persecutes his brother, is void of true faith, and will be treated by Christ at the day of judgment, as an hypocrite and unbeliever, Matt. xxiv. 51.

4. If

SERM. 4. IF faith in Jesus Christ be such an  
VIII. effectual persuasion of mind concerning the  
truth of his religion, as produces a holy  
life; we should take care, that we are not  
imposed upon by any wrong definitions of  
faith, and imagine we savingly believe, when  
we do not. Many Christians seem not well  
to consider, why faith is so much insisted  
upon in the discourses of Christ and his  
apostles; and by mistaking this have been  
led to think, that faith alone is sufficient to  
their justification; which has been the cause  
of very dangerous opinions, and very hot  
disputes. They should remember, that the  
gospel was first preached both to Jews and  
Gentiles, when they had strangely departed  
from true religion; and lived in all manner  
of wickedness; and therefore faith in Jesus  
Christ was required, not because it is alone  
sufficient, but that it might engage believers  
to forsake their sins and to regulate their lives  
according to his example and precepts. And  
indeed in preaching to them, who already  
believe in Jesus Christ, our great work is  
to persuade them to manifest the sincerity of  
their faith by a suitable life, and to convince  
them, that they cannot be saved by believing  
only, but must lead holy lives. In this we  
have the practice of the apostles for our imi-  
tation, who in those epistles, which they  
sent to believers, exhort them to walk wor-  
thy of their high vocation; and shew them  
the impossibility of being saved by Jesus  
Christ,

Christ, unless they keep his commandments. SERM.  
It might be proved by a great variety of pas- VIII.  
sages in the holy scriptures, that one prin-  
cipal end of the coming of Christ, and even  
of that sacrifice, which he offered for us  
upon the cross, was to deliver us from our  
iniquities, and to make us a peculiar people  
zealous of good works; that, forsaking our  
sins, we may obtain the forgiveness of them,  
and through obedience to his commands  
may be prepared for a state of perfect pu-  
rity and happiness above. And it has been  
the endeavour of the great enemy of man-  
kind to defeat this glorious design, by cor-  
rupting the notions of Christians, and weak-  
ening those motives to obedience, which are  
set before them in the gospel; and those  
false definitions of faith, which have pre-  
vailed in the world, have not a little contri-  
buted to favor his malicious views. It has  
been defined, A rolling ourselves on Christ,  
A recumbency on his merits, A looking to  
him for salvation. But certainly as these are  
not true definitions of faith, so they may  
be attended with very unhappy consequen-  
ces. For may not even wicked men think  
they roll themselves on Jesus Christ, and  
look to him for salvation, and from thence  
imagine they are in a good state; tho they  
really are in a bad state, because they do  
not obey his commandments? Whereas, if  
faith was defined to be such an assent to the  
truth of the christian religion, such a belief  
in



SERM. in Jesus, as the true Messias and only Sa-  
 VIII. viour of the world, as produces a sincere  
 ~~~~~ obedience to all his commands, no man,  
 who does not lead a christian life, could
 presume, that he was in a state of salva-
 tion; but would see the necessity of for-
 saking his sins, and living a better life, in
 order to obtain pardon of God, and eternal
 salvation, through Jesus Christ the only me-
 diator between God and man. But those
 false and imperfect definitions, it may be
 justly feared, have led some men to rely on
 what Christ has done for them, without
 shewing due regard to his commands; and
 even caused them to speak contemptuously of
 those good works, which he requires us to
 practise, and without which, it is declared,
 our faith will be ineffectual. For if we con-
 sult the scriptures, and attentively consider the
 descriptions of true faith, which are there
 given us, we shall find, that it is not a re-
 liance on the merits of Christ only; but
 such a firm persuasion of the truth of his
 religion, as purifies us from all wilful sin,
 and effectually engages us to thankfulness,
 love and obedience. And if we have this
 faith indeed, we shall not deceive ourselves
 with vain hopes of being saved by his death,
 while we live in contradiction to his will.
 Be persuaded therefore to *add to your faith,*
virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to
knowledge, temperance; and to temperance,
patience; and to patience, godliness; and to
godliness,

godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly SERM.
kindness, charity. For if these things be in VIII.
you, and abound, they make you, that ye shall
neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the know-
ledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.—For so an
entrance shall be ministred unto you abundant-
ly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord
and Saviour Jesus Christ. Which God of
his infinite mercy grant, &c.



SERMON



S E R M O N IX.

The unbelief of the citizens of Nazareth unreasonable.

MARK VI. 1, 2, 3.

And he went out from thence, and came into his own country, and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many bearing him, were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this, which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

SERM.
IX.



THE place, from which our blessed Saviour went, was Capernaum, where he had resided for some time, and had done many wonderful works. From thence he returned to his own country, not to Bethlehem the place of his birth, but to Nazareth,

reth, where he was educated; for here his S E R M.
reputed father lived, before he was born, IX.
and settled again upon their return out of Egypt. Matt. ii. 23. compared with Luke
ii. 4. The fame of his mighty works had
reached Nazareth, before he went thither
at this time, as appears from the second
verse; and it might be reasonably expected,
that this would have disposed the people to
hear him more favorably than they had
done. *When therefore the sabbath day was
come, he began to teach them in the synagogue,*
as he used to do in other places; and many,
who heard him, could not but admire his
discourse, and were astonished at the mira-
cles, which he had performed here, as well
as in divers other places. That which raised
their admiration the higher, was the
meanness of his parentage and education. */*
Is not this, said they, the carpenter, the son
of Mary? From whence it is evident, that */ d.*
he was brought up to the business of his re-
puted father, as an ancient christian writer
hath affirmed^a; and it must be confessed,
that this employment was not too mean for
that state of humiliation, to which he vo-
luntarily abased himself for the salvation of
men. But the Jews could not wonder at
this only, because their own Rabbins were
trained up to some mechanic art; as St. Paul
was a tentmaker by trade, tho educated at
the feet of Gamaliel. What they chiefly
admired

^a Justin, Mar. in Dial. cum Tryph. p. 270. Ed. Jeb.

SERM. admired therefore was, that Jesus, who had

IX. not a learned education like the scribes, but
 was only brought up to his father's trade, should expound the law with so much clearness and authority. They take notice likewise of the meanness of his relations; *The son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joseph, and of Juda, and Simon.* There have been three different opinions concerning these brethren of Jesus. Some have supposed, that they were the children of Joseph by Mary after the birth of our blessed Lord; and others have thought they were his sons by a former wife. But that opinion, which has most generally prevailed, and seems to have the best foundation, is, that they were her sister's sons, and, as such near kinsmen, are called his brethren, by a way of speaking usual with the Jews, and as ancient as the patriarchal times*. That they were his kinsmen appears from the Evangelists compared together. For his blessed mother had another sister, named also Mary, who was the wife of Cleophas, as St. John informs us, ch. xix. 25. *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas.* And this Mary is thus described by St. Mark, *and Mary the mother of James the less, and of Joseph, and Salome.* That this James was the son of Mary by Cleophas, named also Alpheus, is evident, because

* See Gen. xiii. 8, 11. and xxix. 15.

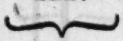
cause St. Paul expressly calls *the Lord's brother* an apostle, Gal. i. 19. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother: and besides James the brother of John, there is no James numbered with the apostles, but the son of Alphaeus. They add, *and are not his sisters here with us?* From whence we may suppose, they remained at Nazareth, and did not remove to Capernaum with Jesus and his mother. However this was, it is certain his countrymen did not believe in him, tho they admired his doctrine, and were astonished at his miracles. *And they were offended at him,* or did not believe in him, because his condition was so mean. Their unbelief indeed was so unreasonable, that he marveled at it: from whence we must not suppose, I presume, that none of them believed; but that fewer believed here, than in other places. Among them, who did not believe in him, were some of his own relations, as St. John informs us, ch. vii. 5. *For neither did his brethren believe in him.* Who these were, is uncertain; but they could not be his brethren mentioned in the text, because these believed in him, and were two or three of them chosen to be his apostles. I have shewn from St. Paul, that James the Lord's brother was an apostle; and St. Jude, who calls himself the brother of James in the first verse of his epistle, is also reckoned with the apostles in the gospels, and by

R

St.

SERM.
IX.

SERM. St. Luke in the Acts. Simon the other bro-

IX. ther is supposed to be Simon Zelotes. Now Christ had chosen his apostles before that feast, of which St. John is speaking in the context. But is it not a wonder, may some say, that any of his own countrymen, especially of his own relations, did not believe in him, if he was such an extraordinary and divine person, as the apostles represent? If he was pure from all sin, and went about doing good; if his doctrine was so excellent, his miracles so numerous and great; how could they think meanly of him, or resist the evidences of his doctrine? We might think his spotless life and mighty works, his readiness to do good to the distressed, and his great usefulness in all respects, would have placed him above contempt, and gained him the veneration and esteem of all men; and yet, how strange soever it may seem, the writers of his life ingenuously confess, that the people of Nazareth, where he was most known, did not believe in him. But then their relating this fact with so much plainness is a great argument of their sincerity; and if all things are fairly considered, it will not appear very strange, that the holy Jesus was slighted by his own countrymen, or accused by others with acting by the power of evil spirits. Are there not men, who hate virtue itself, and deny the being of God; who suppose the world to be the effect of mere chance, tho' wisely contrived in all respects; who

who have even thought it to be the work S E R M.
of an evil being, tho innumerable effects of IX.
infinite goodness are every where to be seen? 

Since the blessed God therefore is denied by some of his own creatures, we should not think it any disadvantage to the cause of Jesus, that he was not received by his own countrymen; but should rather inquire into the true cause of their rejecting him, whether they freely examined, and judged according to reason, or were led by passion and prejudice. We know, that passion and prejudice obstruct the free exercise of reason, and give a wrong bias to the judgment of men, and prevent their consideration in other cases. Now, if we find they judged not according to reason, but were influenced by passion, their unbelief is no argument against the cause of Jesus Christ; but an evident proof, that they did not act well. Having therefore formerly shewn you, that his not doing many miracles in these parts, because of their unbelief, is no just objection against his miracles; I shall now prove to you, that their unbelief is no good argument against the truth of his doctrine. And this, I hope, will sufficiently appear from the following particulars.

1. IT was expedient, that he should descend from mean parentage, and live in a poor condition, when he appeared in the world. He came from God to reveal his will, and to make himself an example of

SERM. virtue to all mankind; and had he been

IX.

brought up to the learning of the Jews, and instructed in the knowlegde of the law by the scribes, it might have been thought, that his doctrine was invented by himself. His skill in arts and sciences might have drawn the admiration of men, and the divinity of his doctrine been obscured; but since he had no learning, as the Jews themselves confessed, this might make it more evident, that he came from God. When he was teaching in the temple at Jerusalem, and *The Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me,* John vii. 15, 16. His having no learning is not indeed of itself a proof, that he came from God; but yet was necessary to prevent some objections, and concured with other things to make his divine mission more manifest, than it could otherwise have been. Moreover if he had been a great and powerful prince, who had places of honor and profit to confer upon his friends, men might have imbraced his religion to obtain his favor, or have been suspected to follow him for their own interest, how sincerely soever they acted. The success of his religion would have been imputed to his secular power, and the divinity of it abundantly less evident. Tho he had wrought as many miracles, as he did in his low circumstances; yet probably the spread-
ing

ing of his institution would have been S E R M.
thought the effect of his power and in- IX.
terest in the world. But since his family 
and condition were so mean and despised,
and he was not raised to great dignity and
power, no man could have any encourage-
ment to adhere to him, who was not sin-
cerely convinced of the truth of his doc-
trine; which made it plain to all, that his
religion was not a creature of the state.
Besides, a poor, afflicted condition was fittest
for him, who was to be an example to men
in every circumstance of life. If he had
lived in fulness and splendor, and met with
no difficulties, distress, and ill usage; how
could he have taught men to bear want and
adversity with patience, and to suffer shame
and reproach for a good conscience with
meekness and courage? In his mean cir-
cumstances he could teach the rich libera-
lity, condescension, and humility, because
he had power to do good by his miracles,
was affable towards all men, and hum-
ble notwithstanding his knowledge, indow-
ments, and fame; but in a high and
flourishing station, he could not have been
an example of contentment, patience, and
submission. That the divinity of his doc-
trine therefore might more clearly appear,
that he might be an example of all virtue,
it was necessary that he should not be a per-
son of a great family, learning, and power;
but mean, poor, and afflicted. There were

SERM. other circumstances of those times, other

IX. great ends of his coming into the world, which made it requisite, that he should be poor and unlearned; but these may be sufficient to have observed at present.

2. His countrymen had a greater prejudice against him for his mean birth, and poor condition, than many others entertained. It is true, the Jews in other places thought meanly of him for his low education. When he was at Jerusalem in the feast of tabernacles, *The Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?* John vii. 15. At the same time the Pharisees raised another objection against him from the country, in which he was brought up, ver. 52. *They answered, and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.* But yet we may justly suppose, that these prejudices, the last only excepted, were stronger in the men of Nazareth, than in other people. It has been the lot of many excellent men to be slighted and ill used in their own country, tho' admired and caressed in other places; because their countrymen had some interest to oppose them, or envied their reputation. This was so common in those times, that it seems to have grown into a proverb among the Jews and neighbouring people. Our Saviour therefore *said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country,*
and

and among his own kin, and in his own house, SERM.
ver. 4; which is to be understood compara- IX.
tively, that a prophet is most generally

slighted by his own countrymen, tho respected and honored by foreigners. The same observation has been made in other countries, and by other authors, who have shewn, that many great men have been unjustly slighted by their own countrymen, tho highly valued, and honorably treated by other nations. *A philosopher,* says one, *is not without hardship in his own country.* It is no wonder therefore, that Jesus was less esteemed by his own townsmen than by others, because they were better acquainted with the meanness of his birth and education. In other parts, where men did not so well understand, nor so much think upon his low condition, they did not envy his honor, nor entertain so many prejudices against him; and had therefore more regard to his miraculous works, and were better disposed to hear his excellent discourses with attention and profit. But his own countrymen did not only know more of his family and education, but likewise envied his great wisdom and reputation; and could not bear to be exceeded by one of so mean birth and condition. *Is not this the carpenter?* They were ashamed to be the disciples of one, who was meanly educated, and had no fame among their doctors. They might likewise have the same prejudice against him, which

SERM. the other Jews had, because of that mean
 IX. appearance which he made. They expected, that the Messias would come with great glory and power to deliver them from all their enemies, and to restore their kingdom; and therefore did not believe in Jesus, and receive him as that prophet, who was to come, because his appearance was so mean, and contrary to their expectations: but were prejudiced against him, and rejected him for his meanness and poverty. That they had not so much respect for him, as others had, is plain, because they did not bring their sick to be healed; for which reason he did not perform so many mighty works among them, as he did in other cities. But then to the ill opinion, which they had conceived of him for his low extraction and mean circumstances, were added various sinful passions; as envy, pride, an exorbitant love of riches, and an immoderate pursuit of worldly honors. Their ill temper shewed itself, when he represented to them from the case of the widow of Zarepta, and of Naaman the Syrian, that he did not do so many wonderful works among them, as in other parts; because they had not made an honest use of former means, but unjustly slighted him. For instead of taking his reproof well, and considering better, they intended to destroy him: *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him*

him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill (whereon their city was built) that they might cast him down headlong, Luke iv. 28, 29. SERM. IX.

3. THIS prejudice, which arose from their false notions, and was confirmed by their evil passions, was the only cause of their unbelief. They did not convict him of any practice unworthy of that character, which he assumed, nor of any base ends in preaching his doctrine. The purity and strictness of his conversation, his poor condition and brave contempt of this world, secured him from all imputations of this kind. They did not charge him with preaching any doctrine, which was unworthy of God; nor could they indeed, since he explained the law more perfectly than the Scribes and Pharisees, whom he justly blamed for making it void by their own traditions. As for his miracles, they could not pretend to deny them, because they beheld some done among themselves, and had certain intelligence of many more performed in other parts. They were even astonished at the greatness of them, and could not detect him of any forgery, nor prove, that they were not really acts of divine power. That he had not attained this excellent wisdom, and power of doing wonders, by any learning or curious arts, they were convinced within themselves; because they knew what his education had been.

From

SERM. *From whence hath this man these things?* He

IX. could not learn them at home, and he has
 had no education abroad. And if they
 could not prove, that his life was unsuitable
 to the character of the Messias, his doctrine
 not fit to be received as the will of God, his
 miracles not truly performed; they ought
 to have believed in him. He professed that
 he came from God, and was that very pro-
 phet, whom the nation expected; for be-
 fore this time, when he explained to them
 the words of Isaiah, he said, *This day is
 this scripture fulfilled in your ears*, Luke iv.
 21. They could not then contradict what
 he said, nor prove that his doctrine was un-
 worthy of God; but *all bare him witness*,
 or acknowledged that the scripture was ful-
 filled, *and wondered at the gracious words,*
which proceeded out of his mouth. His
 countrymen were not only convinced, that
 his miracles were truly done, and his doc-
 trine good in itself; but they were almost
 inclined to believe in him, wavering between
 their convictions and their prejudices, till the
 latter prevailed. *And they said, Is not this
 Josephs son?* Luke iv. 22. Neither had
 they any thing to object against his life,
 doctrine, or miracles, when he made them
 this second visit; but this great thing they
 had against his person, that he was of mean
 parentage, and low education; *Is not this
 the carpenter?*

4. THE meanness of his birth and edu- SERM.
cation, was not a sufficient reason for their IX.
not believing in him. For does it necessarily
follow, that he was not a true prophet, be-
cause he was meanly born and educated? Is
it just to conclude, that a man speaks false-
ly, because he is poor; or that he is in the
right, because he comes of a good family
and is rich? Was one, who professed him-
self a prophet, to be tried by his external
circumstances, or by his life, doctrine, and
miracles? Does their own law any where
make a low pedigree, and mean condition,
the characteristics of a false prophet; or
birth, education, and prosperity the signs of
one, who truly comes from God? God has
no regard to the circumstances of men, but
to their pious dispositions, and good con-
duct; and may reveal his will by one who
is meanly descended, as well as by one,
who is of better extraction. It is a maxim
in their own writings, that *He raiseth up
the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the
beggar from the dunghil, to set them among
princes, and to make them inherit the throne
of glory*, 1 Sam. ii. 8. The same observa-
tion likewise occurs in Psalm cxiii. 7, 8;
according to which, God often raiseth men
of the meanest rank to execute his designs,
and confers the highest honors upon them.
The history of their own nation may fur-
nish us with instances of this kind. Moses,
their great lawgiver, who was sent to deli-

SERM. ver them from bondage, and to conduct

IX. them into the promised land, descended

from obscure parents. David followed the employment of a shepherd, when he was anointed king of Israel, and indowed with the spirit of prophecy in an eminent degree. Others of their prophets were men of mean descent, and some of them slighted, ill used, and cruelly put to death by those, to whom they prophesied. The mean condition of Jesus therefore was no just cause for their unbelief, because it was no mark of imposture; but many other things there were, which might have induced them to receive him as a true prophet, and the expected Saviour. His precepts were suitable to the attributes of God, and tended to promote the good of mankind. He used no indeavours to enrich and aggrandize himself, but his great end was to promote true religion, and persuade men to real holiness. His whole doctrine, as well as his precepts, was calculated to discountenance vice, and to promote the practice of all virtue. His miracles were more in number, much greater, and more beneficent in their effects, than were done by any of the preceding prophets; and so fairly and openly done before great numbers of people, that they could not disprove, but were astonished at them. All these things were better signs of his being a prophet, who truly came from God, than his mean pedigree could be a proof, that

that he did not come from him ; and consequently were juster reasons for their receiving him, than that was for their unbelief. His doctrine and miracles, which were just reasons for their believing in him as a true prophet, notwithstanding his mean descent and circumstances, were also as good reasons for their receiving him as the expected Messias, whom he professed himself to be. For if he had falsely asserted that he was the Messias, how could he do greater miracles to prove he was, than were ever done to confirm the authority of a true prophet ? I will not now enter into the argument about miracles, but it may be certainly affirmed, that to them, who were so far from being able to deny, that they were forced with wonder to confess his miracles, they were a juster cause to believe, that he was the Messias, than his mean state was for believing the contrary. They might mistake the meaning of the prophets, but his miracles proved, that he spake the truth in affirming, that he was the true Messias ; because if he had falsely affirmed this, it is most unreasonable to suppose, that God would have suffered these wonderful works to be done by him in his name.

5. THO the meanness of his birth and education was no just reason for their unbelief, yet for this they rejected him without consideration and inquiry. For when they acknowledged the excellency of his doctrine,

S E R M.
IX.

SERM. trine, and could not but confess the truth.

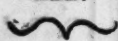
IX. of his miracles, what course did they take?
 Did they fairly consider, whether, since he could not have this wisdom and power of himself, he must not have it from God, and consequently be a true prophet, in whom they ought to believe? Did they honestly inquire, whether he was not of the tribe of Judah, and city of David, tho he was educated in their city? This ought to have been searched into, before they formed any judgment concerning him; because it is incontestable, that they did not all live at that time in their own tribes and cities, but dwelt in other parts of Judea. This is evident from the taxation in the time of Augustus Cesar, when all the inhabitants went up to their respective tribes and cities to be taxed. When therefore they beheld the mighty works, which were done by his hands, and knew that he professed himself to be the Messias, they ought to have inquired, whether he was not of the family of David. The meanness of his birth and condition should not have made them neglect this inquiry; since the royal family was then decayed, and God might raise up a mean person to be the Messias, as he took David from the sheepfold to be not only a great prophet, but also king of Israel. They might expect a Saviour, who would deliver them from the Roman yoke; but since Jesus declared, that he was the Messias, and that

that he came to deliver them from their sins, SERM.
 was it not their duty, was it not worth their IX.
 regard to consider, whether this was not the
 salvation, which was promised them by the
 Messias? Whether it would not be more for
 the honor of the living God, whom they
 worshiped, more indeed for their own good
 to be saved from their sins, than from their
 temporal enemies? And whether this was
 not indeed more agreeable to the true sense
 of the prophets, notwithstanding their former
 conceptions, than that expectation of a
 temporal deliverance, which they had entertained?
 These things, it is certain, they ought to have
 examined, since Jesus, who did not assume a
 temporal power, did yet profess to be the
 Messias, and to come to save them from their
 sins. But instead of these and other proper
 inquiries and considerations, what did they
 do? They rejected him for his meanness only,
Is not this the carpenter? Thus their prejudices prevailed,
 and all proper and necessary inquiries were omitted.

6. UPON the whole therefore, since they rejected Jesus for his mean birth and education, but had nothing to allege against his doctrine, miracles and life; since his low state was no just cause for their unbelief, and yet for this only they rejected him without due consideration; their judgment is not to be regarded. They did not judge according to reason, and the merits of the cause,

SERM. cause, but were governed by unreasonable

IX.



prejudice is most likely to be false, and ought not to be any precedent to us, who come after them. We should judge in this case for ourselves, and not be determined by their unbelief. We have the history of his life before us, which his enemies could never disprove, and in which this case is impartially related; we know what doctrines he taught, and what miracles he performed; and what is contained in this history is supported by all ancient records. We should therefore consider, whether his doctrines and precepts are worthy of God; and whether his miracles, all things fairly considered, could be done by any other than a divine power. If we are convinced upon a fair inquiry, that his doctrine is good, his miracles truly divine, we ought to believe and hope in him, notwithstanding their unbelief. For can we pretend, that they acted well in rejecting him, because of his mean extraction and poor condition; that his mean condition was a better reason for rejecting him, than his doctrine and miracles were for believing in him? Their judgment is so far from being any just prejudice against Jesus, that it is advantageous to his cause: since they rejected him on the account of his poverty, which in the nature of things was no just cause for their not believing in him; and were at the same time constrained by the

the glaring evidence of truth to acknow- SERM.
ledge, what was really in his favor, and IX.
was only to be regarded in this case, the
excellency of his doctrine and the truth of
his miraculous works. They did not there-
fore only act against reason, but likewise a-
gainst their own convictions; for they were
even astonished at his great wisdom and
mighty works, at the same time that they
gave way to unjust prejudice. Their reason
therefore was for Jesus, tho their prejudices
and passions were against him. They acted
like men, who see the excellency of virtue,
and almost resolve to imbrace it; but yet
some old indulged habit, or prevailing inte-
rest turns the scale, and makes them take the
side of vice. And as the conduct of such
men is no just reason, why we should hate
virtue and follow vitious courses; so neither
is the judgment of these people of Naza-
reth, who acted contrary to their own rea-
son and convictions, a just cause, why we
should not believe in Jesus, as the promised
Messias, and only Saviour of the world.
And having, I hope, sufficiently manifested
this, I shall now conclude this discourse with
some inferences.

I. FROM hence we may understand, that
the true cause of unbelief is some unjust
prejudice, or violent passion, or gross neglect
arising from the evil dispositions of men.
These countrymen of Jesus had strong pre-
judices against him, and envied his reputa-
tion;

SERM. tion; and therefore did not seriously consider and examine, but in spite of their own
IX. convictions rejected him. There are none at this time, it may be justly feared, who give into unbelief upon a full and fair inquiry, before they have been tainted with unjust prejudices against Christianity. Many young persons, who have never considered the grounds of religion, and are not governed by true principles of virtue, but are addicted to youthful lusts, too easily incline to unbelief, when they hear objections made against some places of scripture, or some particular doctrines, in which they have been educated. It soothes the inclination they feel in themselves to a free, licentious life, which the christian religion will not allow; and the longer they procede in a sensual course, the less inclination they have to inquire, and the more firmly they are riveted in their infidelity. And when others, who are farther advanced in years, and have lived in obedience to Christ, become remiss in religion through the allurements of the world, and the inticements of evil company, they listen too easily to those objections, which are made against divine revelation. When difficulties arise in their own breasts, or are thrown in their way by their merry companions; they do not sit down and fairly consider, whether the evidences for the truth of the gospel history, are not sufficient, and whether the design, doctrines,
and

and precepts of Christ are not worthy of SERM.
God; but their indifferency for religion, IX.
and those prejudices which prevail in them, 
hinder their examination, and are the cause
of their unbelief. These having lost their
first love and zeal for religion, as well as
younger persons, who have been educated in
the knowledge of religion, but have no zeal
for it, are so indolent, that they will not give
themselves time to consider matters with
due care and diligence. But certainly both
act very unwisely; for if religion be true,
they, who believe it sincerely, will be the
better for it here, as well as unspeakably
happy hereafter; but they, who believe not,
both suffer the evil consequences of their
vices here, and will be miserable in the fu-
ture state. Others have indulged pride, im-
purity, revenge, and other vices, condemned
by the christian religion, and which they
will not correct; from whence they contract
an unconquerable aversion against Christiani-
ty, and give into unbelief. One Uriel A-
costa would not believe in Jesus Christ, be-
cause he commands us to love our enemies;
tho no precept can be founded upon better
reason, nor be more for the good of society.
But the man was of a revengeful temper,
and would not forgive the Jews, by whom
he had been ill used. Many have set them-
selves against the christian institution be-
cause of those superstitions, which have been
introduced, and those doctrines inconsistent

SERM. with the attributes of God, which have been
 IX. held by some Christians. Others take offence
 { at that difference of opinion, and looseness of
 manners, which prevail amongst Christians.
 But it is certain, that none of these things
 affect the merit of the cause, and therefore
 they should consider, what Christianity is in
 itself, as taught in the writings of the apo-
 stles; and if they find it to be true upon a
 fair examination, they should avoid those
 faults, which others commit. They may
 as justly renounce their reason, because the
 generality of men reason badly, and act
 contrary to it; as reject the christian reli-
 gion, because so many Christians have de-
 parted from the simplicity of the gospel,
 and do not live up to its rules.

2. WE ought not to judge of men by
 their circumstances. The generality of men
 indeed are led more by outward appearances,
 than by solid reason. They judge some men
 to be enemies to God, because they meet
 with great calamities; and conceive others
 to be in his favor, because they succede and
 prosper in the world. They receive some
 opinions, because they are fashionable, and
 held by men of learning; and condemn
 others as false, because they, who profess
 them, are few, mean, and persecuted. But
 certainly it is a shame for Christians to be
 influenced in the choice of their sentiments
 by such considerations; since the case of
 their common Saviour manifestly shews,
 how

how little all these things are to be regarded. S E R M.
He was poor and despised, was put to death IX.
as a blasphemer and malefactor; tho he was
the most holy person in the world, and the
most dear to almighty God. He was slight-
ed, because he was meanly educated, and
the rulers of the people did not believe in
him; tho he was the only begotten Son of
God, and the very oracle of truth. How
ill then does it become Christians to censure
others as erroneous, merely because they are
mean, spoken against, and oppressed? How
weak is it to make prosperity the mark of a
true church; when the founder of our faith
was so mean and persecuted, and his imme-
diate followers every where falsely accused,
and unjustly oppressed?

3. IN forming our judgment about mat-
ters of religion, we should abstract our
thoughts from all external things, honor,
riches, numbers, antiquity, and the like.
These are no marks of truth, and may lead
us into error, if we are determined by them
in choosing our faith; and if we should
happen to take the right side of the que-
stion, it will be no virtue in us, because our
choice is directed by wrong views, and is
not the result of a sincere inquiry, and real
conviction of judgment. But it is far more
probable, that we shall err from the truth,
because as the virtuous part of mankind is
the least; so the professors of true religion
are generally the fewest in number, and the

SERM. meanest in quality. We ought therefore to

IX. possess ourselves with a sincere, inflexible regard to truth and virtue, and should endeavour to form our judgment according to reason and scripture, without any regard to other views. We should follow our convictions, whether we are led to choose that, which is generally received, or not. We shall never be able to judge well, and choose aright, if we mind fashion, interest, honor, or other worldly considerations, and are not solely determined by our reason and our Bibles.

4. THE consideration of our blessed Saviour's case may support and cheer us under all the contempt and ill usage, which we meet with in the sincere profession of what we believe to be true. He, who was most perfectly wise and holy, the blessed author and finisher of our faith, whose doctrines were infallibly true, was slighted and contemned by his own countrymen: and why then should we be dejected, and trouble ourselves, if we also are unjustly ill thought of and despised? Have we not reason to be contented, since our blessed master suffered the same things in this world? Let us not therefore be ashamed of him and of his words, that he may not be ashamed of us, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels; but let us stedfastly follow him, *who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising*

despising the shame, that, when he comes a-
gain, he may receive us into his kingdom **SERM.**
and glory; which God of his infinite mercy **IX.**
grant unto all of us, through Jesus Christ
our Lord.





S E R M O N X.

Of God's not giving men hearts
to perceive.

DEUT. XXIX. 4.

*Yet the Lord hath not given you
an heart to perceive, and eyes
to see, and ears to hear, unto
this day.*

SERM.
X.



THE Israelites had beheld the mighty power of God in Egypt, at the red sea, and in the wilderness; they entered into covenant with him at Horeb, and had received repeated assurances of his faithfulness: but notwithstanding all this, they frequently offended him by their murmuring, rebellion, and idolatry, and at length most highly provoked him by their unreasonable fearfulness, distrust, and unbelief, upon the return of the spies from Canaan. He therefore justly decreed, that none of them, who were numbered when they came out

out of Egypt, should enter into the pro-
mised land, but should die in the wilder-
ness. When this time was expired, and all

SERM.
X.

those persons dead, he renewed his covenant with their posterity in the land of Moab. The words of my text are part of that speech, which Moses made to them upon this awful and solemn occasion. In the preceding and following verses, he reminds them of those wonders they had seen, and those victories they had obtained, that he might encourage them to put their trust in God, and dispose them to ingage in this covenant with due seriousness and resolution. *Ye have seen*, says he, *ver. 2, all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land.* He addresses them in this manner, because, tho all of them died in the wilderness, who were numbered, when they came out of Egypt; yet none were then numbered, who were under twenty years of age, Numb. i. 2, 3. compared with, ch. xiv. 29: so that none of the persons, to whom this speech was addressed, could be more than sixty years of age, except Joshua and Caleb; and yet many of them had been eyewitnesses of the great things, which God had done for their deliverance in Egypt. But notwithstanding what they had seen of the power and goodness of God, what had been denounced against and inflicted upon their fathers for their

SERM. their distrust and unbelief; yet they likewise had been guilty of murmuring, fornication, and idolatry several times, as is related in the book of Numbers, ch. xvi. xx. xxi. xxv. For this reason he says, *Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.* The sacred writers express the faculties of the mind by terms borrowed from those bodily organs, which are subservient to them. The heart, which is supposed to be the seat of the intellectual power, signifies the understanding; the eye, with which we view things in order to know what they are, denotes the faculty of considering and judging; and the ear, by which we perceive what is said to us, is put for that attention of the mind, which is necessary to obedience. An heart to perceive therefore, an eye to see, and an ear to hear, signify a capacity to understand, consider, and obey. And sometimes by these phrases may be intended that natural capacity, which God has given men, to understand, consider and perform their duty. As in Ezek. xii. 2. *Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.* And sometimes they are supposed to express a moral capacity, or a good disposition to consider and receive what is said, as when Christ concludes some important matter with these words,

words, *He that hath ears to hear, let him* SERM.
hear, Matt. xi. 15. But what does Moses X.
 here mean by speaking to them in this man-
 ner? Does he intend to say, that God had
 not actually given them, and never designed
 to give them a capacity to understand, con-
 sider and perform their duty? that he denied
 them sufficient grace, and was nevertheless
 offended with them for not doing what was
 above their strength? This indeed is what
 some infer from these words, but certainly
 this cannot be what Moses intended. For,

I. NOTHING can be more inconsistent
 with the perfect goodness and justice of the
 divine Being, with those notions which Mo-
 ses received from himself, when *the Lord*
passed by before him, and proclaimed, The
Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious,
longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and in
truth, Exod. xxxiv. 6. He required the Is-
 raelites to believe in his promises, and to
 obey his commandments; and great evils
 were inflicted upon them for their unbelief
 and disobedience. And is it the character
 of infinite goodness to injoin men what is
 above their abilities, and not to give them
 proportionable strength, if their duty does,
 in any particular circumstances, exceed the
 measure of their capacity? Does it become
 a being of perfect justice to punish men for
 not doing what is above their strength, and
 what he never intended they should do?
 Such unmerciful and unrighteous treatment
 the

SERM. the Israelites received from their haughty

X. oppressor in Egypt; but surely they were
 not used in this manner by the supreme
 ruler of the world, who had graciously delivered them from his arbitrary power and cruelty. No, he really desired, that they would be so wise, as to consider their own good, and keep his commandments, ch. v. 29. *O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children for ever!* And could he so pathetically wish they would keep his commandments, and truly declare this to be his desire, if he had not indowed them with sufficient abilities to understand and obey his will?

2. THIS inference is no less disagreeable to the kindness, which God had shewn this people, and to the whole course of his providence towards them, than it is to his own perfections. When they were under intolerable oppressions in Egypt, he graciously impowered and sent Moses to do such mighty works before Pharaoh, as disposed him to let them depart. He conducted them safely through the red sea, in which their cruel oppressor, and his army were drowned. The laws he gave them by Moses were plain and intelligible to the meanest capacities, and the promises he made them of his protection and favor such, as might reasonably ingage them to obedience. He often supplied them

by a miracle in the wilderness, and as often SERM.
 punished their murmuring and rebellion. All X.
 these things were proper means to command
 their attention, and to ingage their faith; to
 impress upon their spirits such a fear of him,
 as might restrain them from sin, and such a
 love, as might win them to obedience; to
 bring them to repentance, when they had
 sinned, and to excite them to greater sted-
 fastness in doing his will. What more
 could be done to make them understand his
 will, or to incline them to obey his laws?
 How then could it be his real design, that
 they should not understand? Had it been
 his intention, that they should not under-
 stand, consider and obey, he would not
 have taken methods so contrary to his own
 purpose.

3. FURTHERMORE this sense will not
 agree with the end of Moses in speaking
 to them, nor with the other parts of his
 discourse. His design manifestly was to
 move them to a serious consideration of
 their past sins, that they might repent of
 them, and make this covenant with a
 hearty resolution not to rebel against God,
 as they had often done; but to continue
 obedient to his voice, that they might injoy
 the promised land. *Keep therefore, says he,*
the words of this covenant and do them, that
ye may prosper in all that ye do, ver. 9. This
 exhortation depends on what goes before,
 but how could he hope to work them into

SERM. a godly sorrow for their past transgressions,

X. or a firm resolution of acting better, by affirming, that God had not given them ability to keep his commandments? Such discourse might rather furnish them with an excuse for all their wickedness, than excite them to amendment. What heart could they have to endeavour to reform, if God had not given them a capacity to discern their true interest, and ability to pursue it by observing his laws? In order to persuade them to a reformation, one may think, he would reproach them with their own wilful neglects, rather than with the want of necessary assistance. Besides, this makes Moses contradict himself, for he plainly declares in the next words, that God designed they should know and obey his will, ver. 5. *And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot,—that ye might know that I am the Lord your God.* Wherefore,

4. SINCE this sense is so contrary to the attributes of God, to the natural tendency and design of all his dealings with this people, and to the end of Moses in this speech, let us compare this passage with others more plain, and observe whether they impute disobedience to incapacity, or to wilful inconsideration and obstinacy. We find the Israelites are frequently commanded to obey, which implies, that they had power to obey; and

and are blamed for their wickedness, which S E R M.
is an argument, that it arose from their own X.
fault. In the tenth chapter he says to them, *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart,*
and be no more stiffnecked, ver. 16; which
exhortation would be in vain, if they were
not capable to observe it; and implies, that
their former disobedience proceeded from the
perverseness of their wills. That this peo-
ple might have done better, and been more
happy, if they had not wickedly resisted
the grace of God, and wilfully neglected
the means he gave them, is plain likewise
from the exhortation of Hezekiah to them
in his time, 2 Chron. xxx. 8. *Now be ye not*
stiffnecked as your fathers were, but yield
yourself unto the Lord. This appears also
from the words of the Psalmist, Psal. xcv. 8.
Harden not your heart, as in the provocation,
and as in the day of temptation in the wilder-
ness. As they could not but understand the
law of God, they might know how misera-
ble the consequences of disobedience would
be; but not seriously considering, they were
carried away by temptation, and hardened
through the deceitfulness of sin. Moreover
from the author of the epistle to the He-
brews, and indeed from the whole account
of Moses, it is plain, that nothing was omit-
ted on the part of God, which was necessary
to give them the knowledge of their duty,
or to move them to a suitable practice. He
was therefore justly provoked with their dis-
obedience,

SERM. obedience, but what cause could he have to
 X. be offended with them, if they were not
 inabled to do what he required, and it was
 what he never intended they should do?

THESE considerations, I think, evidently demonstrate, that Moses could not say to the people of Israel, that God had not given them a capacity to understand his will, and to govern themselves by it in the general course of their lives. We ought therefore to put such a sense upon these words, as will be agreeable to the attributes of God, and his gracious treatment of this people; to the design of the speaker, and those numerous places of scripture, which lay all the blame upon them. And this we may do,

I. BY giving another translation of the words, which they will very well bear.
 Or,

II. BY giving a just explication of them, as they now lie, according to the phraseology of scripture.

I. BY giving another translation of the words, which they will very well bear.

PERSONS sometimes use interrogations in their speech, when they are very much moved and affected. Which form of expression, without a negative particle, more strongly

strongly denies; as in Gen. xviii. 17. *And* SERM.
the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham X.
that thing, which I do? The sense of which

is, Surely I will not hide from Abraham that thing, which I do. On the other hand, an interrogation with a negative particle is an earnest affirmation. So Mark xii. 24. *And Jesus answering said unto them: Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?* The import of which is, *Ye do certainly err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God,* as St. Matthew expresses it, ch. xxii. 29. Thus, in the passage before us, when Moses has commemorated the wonderful works and goodness of God, and reflected upon the horrible ingratitude and obstinacy of the people; his spirit grows warm, and he breaks out into a vehement exhortation, which may be thus translated: *And hath not God given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day?* The meaning of which is, according to the use of such interrogations, *And God hath given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, even to this time.* The miracles you have seen time after time might satisfy you, that he could fulfil his promise, and settle you in the quiet possession of the promised land. The calamities, which he has inflicted upon you for your unreasonable distrust, with his great forbearance in not destroying you all for your repeated provocations, were sufficient to deter you from sin, and

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make

SERM. make you more obedient to his commands.

X. You might therefore have been wise, and good, and happy, if you had duly considered what you have heard and seen, and had not been so thoughtless and perverse. That this verse may be rendered interrogatively none can doubt, who have observed the use of the original particle in other places. I will give some instances, where it is so rendered by our own translators; and where the sense would have been misrepresented, if they had turned it in the same manner, as they have done this place. Moses says in his answer to Pharaoh, *Lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us?* Exod. viii. 26. We have another instance in the words of Jonathan, 1 Sam. xiv. 30.—*for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?* His answer to David furnishes another example, 1 Sam. xx. 9. *And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly, that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would I not tell it thee?* Again in Job, ch. xi. 11. *For he knoweth vain men; he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it?* In the same book, ch. xxi. 29. *Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do not ye know their tokens?* To these examples I will only add the words of God to Jonah, ch. iv. 11. *And should not I spare Nineveh that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons, that cannot discern between their right hand and their left*

left hand, and also much cattel? In all these places, the interrogation more strongly affirms, and the sense otherwise expressed

SERM.
X.

plainly is, *They will stone us; There had now been a greater slaughter:* and so of the rest. But it is easy to perceive, that the sense of these places would not only have been altered; but intirely perverted to the contrary sense, if translated in the same manner with our text, *They will not stone us; For there had not been now a greater slaughter.* The same may be observed of the other instances. More places might be produced, but these are sufficient to prove this use of the Hebrew particle, when the design of the writer, and the scope of his words require it should be so understood^a. These words therefore being read interrogatively, *And hath not the Lord given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear?* an heart to perceive, eyes to see, and ears to hear, must signify an heart, with which they might have perceived, eyes with which they might have discerned, and ears with which they might have heard, if they

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had

^a אל is frequently thus used, the interrogative prefix ה being understood, and so likewise is אל. In our Bible, Lam. i. 12. 2 Kings v. 26. Jer. xlix. 9, are turned in this manner; and some other places, I think, might have been better so translated, as Job iii. 26. xiii. 15. That the original particle may be thus rendered in the text, has been long since observed by the learned Mr. Le Cene, tho he gives no examples, in his proposal for a new translation of the Bible into French, printed at Rotterdam, mdcxcvi. And accordingly, in his translation lately published he renders it: *Car Dieu ne vous a-t-il pas donné un cœur pour comprendre, et des yeux pour voir, et des oreilles pour ouïr jusqu'à ce jour?*

P/

SERM. had used them, as they ought: that God

X. had not only shewn them their duty, but
 also given them a capacity to understand,
 consider and obey. And that these phrases
 sometimes denote only such a capacity, is
 plain from the words of God to the prophet
 Ezekiel, ch. xii. †. already quoted; and
 from those in Jeremiah, ch. v. 21. *Hear
 now this, O foolish people, and without un-
 derstanding, which have eyes and see not,
 which have ears and hear not.* In these
 places, *eyes and ears*, can only denote a fa-
 culty to understand and obey, but not a
 disposition to consider and obey, acquired
 by a good use of that faculty; for it is evi-
 dent, they were not well disposed to mind,
 and perform their duty, but were wilfully
 disobedient, if not wilfully ignorant. The
 words of Moses being thus understood, he
 is so far from denying, that he, in the
 strongest manner, affirms, that God had
 given them ability to understand and do
 his will; which wholly clears the divine
 justice, and throws all the blame upon the
 people, where it ought to lie. But,

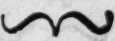
II. THO we do not read the words of
 the Jewish lawgiver interrogatively, but take
 them as they lie in our Bibles; yet if we
 understand them according to the scripture
 phrase in other places, it cannot be justly
 infered from hence, that the Almighty had
 not given them sufficient means and abi-
 lities

lities to know, and do better than they had SERM.
done. For, X.

1. IF we understand these phrases in the sense already given from the prophets Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, of a capacity to understand, consider, and obey; we must explain them by those places of scripture, in which men are said not to have, what they received and possessed, but did not well use and faithfully improve. Matt. xxv. 29. *For unto every one, that hath [who has improved, what he first received] shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not [who has not made a good use of what was given him] shall be taken away, even that which he hath [which he received, but did not rightly improve.]* In like manner they are said not to see or hear, who make not a good use of what they have seen and heard. Matt. xiii. 13. *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not: and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand.* Tho they had beheld his miracles, and heard his discourses; yet they made as little use of what they had seen and heard, as if they had been blind and deaf. They had capacities given them, but they had not made a good use of them. If we suppose Moses therefore to have said, *And yet ye have not an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear unto this day,* his meaning could not possibly be, that they were not indowed with these faculties, which would

SERM. have been false in fact; but that they had
 X. as little considered the wonders they had
 seen, and attended to the instructions given
 them, as if they had not been capable of
 seeing and hearing. And since the sacred
 writers justly represent God to be the author
 of all our faculties and powers, when Moses
 says, *And yet God hath not given you an
 heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to
 hear unto this day*; it is absurd to suppose he
 means, that God had not given them a ca-
 pacity to understand, consider, and obey his
 will, for then he could not have justly
 blamed them for not doing better; but
 that they had as little reflected upon the
 wonders they had seen, and observed the
 precepts given them, as if God had not
 blessed them with these faculties, but they
 were quite blind and deaf. And,

2. ACCORDING to the sense of these
 phrases given from the words of Christ,
 Matt. xi. 15. an heart to perceive, eyes to
 see, and ears to hear, may denote an un-
 derstanding heart, seeing eyes, and hearing
 ears; not a bare faculty of perceiving, see-
 ing, and hearing, but a good disposition to
 understand and obey, acquired by the use
 of that faculty. These expressions are pro-
 verbial, and a man is said to have ears to
 hear, who is well disposed to hear; and
 not to have ears to hear, who is not dispo-
 sed to hear, with due attention and impar-
 tiality, what is said. This seems to be the
 use

use of these phrases in the gospels. When SERM.
 our blessed Lord had been speaking some- X.
 thing of great moment, he concludes with 
 these words, *He that hath ears to hear, let*
him hear, as in several places besides that
 just mentioned. The purport of which
 words is, He whose ears are not deaf, but
 can hear well, who has not a mind blinded
 with prejudice, but is well disposed and open
 to conviction, let him consider what I say.
 An expression like to these occurs in Rev.
 ii. 7. and is repeated several times at the
 conclusion of the epistles to the seven
 churches, *He that hath an ear, let him*
hear: in which words, an ear plainly sig-
 nifies one well disposed to hear, or a mind
 well disposed to consider what is said. Mo-
 ses therefore says not, that God had denied
 them a capacity and means sufficient to un-
 derstand and do his will: but that he had
 not given them an understanding heart, and
 an obedient will, or had not made them
 wise and good men. But when it is said,
 that God had not given these blessings, this
 is not to be understood of his intention, as
 if he was not willing to give them; but
 may be understood of the event only, that
 he had not actually given them, whatever
 was the cause of it. That is said to be
 given, which is accepted; and that not to
 be given, which is refused by him, to
 whom it was offered. If any of us be
 ever so willing to give something to ano-
 ther,

SERM. ther, and he refuses it, we do not indeed
 X. actually give it him; but then it is intirely
 ~~~~~ his fault, who refuses to accept our kindness. This is plainly the case before us. God was willing to give them true wisdom, and to have made them virtuous and happy men; but they wickedly refused his gifts. He gives knowledge, wisdom, virtue, to men in the use of those faculties and means, with which he has blessed them. And if they will not make a good use of these faculties and means, he does not actually bestow these things; but the only cause, why he does not, is their own wilful neglect of means, and wickedly resisting his grace. He plainly manifested his will to the people of Israel, and used all proper means to ingage them to obedience: but they wickedly gave themselves up to the gratification of their lusts, and would not be prevailed upon to consider what was their own interest, as well as their duty. And therefore he did not actually give them a wise heart, and an obedient ear; because they concured not with his grace, but in effect refused these excellent gifts, by neglecting the only means of obtaining them. When Moses therefore says, *And yet the Lord hath not given*, it is no more than if he had said, *And yet ye have not accepted*; your wilful neglect and disobedience only have prevented his giving you, what he intended to bestow. That their unwillingness to receive was the  
 only



only cause of his not giving is manifest, be-  
 cause they are blamed for not having an  
 heart to perceive; and because he had plain-  
 ly declared his will to them, and done many  
 wonderful works before them, that they  
 might understand their duty, and be indu-  
 ced to fear, trust in, and obey him. And  
 it may be proved by many instances, that  
 such expressions declare what is the event  
 thro the wickedness of men, not what was  
 the original design of God. Our blessed  
 Lord says, Matt. x. 34. *I came not to send  
 peace, but a sword:* which certainly was far  
 from being his original intention, or the na-  
 tural tendency of his doctrine: tho it was  
 so in the event through the malice and in-  
 justice of men towards them, who believed  
 in him. *Who*, says the prophet Isaiah, ch.  
 liii. 1. *bath believed our report? and to whom  
 is the arm of the Lord revealed?* God de-  
 signed no doubt, that it should be effectually  
 revealed, tho it proved otherwise in the end:  
 because the people were perversely wicked,  
 and would not attend to the voice of the  
 prophet. St. Paul speaking of the Jews,  
 who believed not, says, Rom. xi. 8. *Ac-  
 cording as it is written, God hath given them  
 the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not  
 see, and ears that they should not hear, unto  
 this day.* Now is it possible that God should  
 send Christ and his apostles to preach the  
 gospel to them, on purpose that they might  
 not discern and obey the truth? Were not  
 their

SERM.  
X.

SERM. their doctrine and miracles sufficient to in-

X. lighten their understanding, and to convince  
 } their judgment, if impartially attended to? It could not therefore be the intention of God to give them up to a stupified mind, tho this was the event through their wilful inconsideration and impenitency. Their own pride, covetousness, malice, and other vices blinded their understanding, and hardened their hearts; so that they would not consider the motives proposed to them, and therefore did not believe. He was so far from infusing into them a spirit of slumber, that he used all proper means to awaken them to consideration; but when they shut their eyes against the light, and turned a deaf ear to all persuasions, he justly left them in that spiritual lethargy, which they had brought upon themselves. God is said to give repentance, knowledge, holiness, when his means take effect upon those, who use them well: and not to give these blessings, when the sloth, inconsideration, and malice of men renders the means ineffectual. 2 Tim. ii. 25. *In meekness instructing those, that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.* That he desired their repentance cannot be doubted. The apostle means therefore, if they will hear instruction, and dispose themselves to receive it of him; and have not by their perverse and malicious opposition to the truth so hardened their hearts,

hearts, that they cannot be wrought upon; SERM.  
so provoked God, that he will leave them to X.  
their own delusions. Not to multiply in-  
stances, the meaning of the text may be  
this. But notwithstanding all the signs and  
wonders you have seen, which were suffi-  
cient to induce you to believe in and obey  
God; yet he hath not actually given you  
an understanding mind, and an obedient  
ear; because you have not accepted his gifts,  
but refused them by resisting his grace, and  
abusing the means of your happiness.

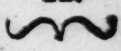
WHICH of these senses was intended by  
Moses, is not easy to determine, because they  
are all so agreeable to the use of the original  
phrase: but this is certain, that every one  
of them is consistent with the perfections of  
God, the design of the speaker, and the te-  
nor of plainer passages. If we read them in-  
terrogatively, he affirms that God had given  
them capacity to perceive, and do his will,  
and therefore they were to blame for not  
acting better. But if we take them as they  
lie in our translation, according to the first  
interpretation under the second head, they  
had as little considered the wonders they  
had seen, and attended to the instructions  
given them, as if God had not indowed  
them with the faculties of seeing and hear-  
ing; or agreeably to the second, that God  
had not actually given them true wis-  
dom, and made them virtuous and hap-  
py, because they rejected his gifts through  
the



SERM. the wilful neglect of those means, by which  
 X. they might have been obtained. We must

therefore confess the goodness and righteousness of God, tho we acknowledge the Israelites to have been exceedingly wicked. Let us take care, that we be not like this people, who so unthankfully abused the mercies of God. *Now all these things, as the apostle observes, speaking of these same persons, bapned unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come, 1 Cor. x. 11.* Let us not therefore wrest this scripture to a wrong sense, but understand it rightly, that we may draw such conclusions from it, as are worthy of God, and will be profitable to ourselves. The inferences which arise from these words rightly understood are;

I. THAT God is holy, just and good in all his ways, and affords means to men with a sincere and kind intention, that by using them well, they may become virtuous and happy. If he had not mercifully designed the good of these Israelites in bringing them out of Egypt, in giving them laws to keep, he could not have justly upbraided them with the abuse of those means, nor reproved them for not being truly wise and good. It is certain therefore, that he gave them his commandments, that they might be observed by them; and led them out of Egypt through the wilderness in so extraordinary a manner, that they might fear and obey him,

him, and inherit the land promised to their S E R M.  
fathers. And what must we suppose to be X.  
the end of God in the present dispensation?   
He has done far greater things for us, and  
blessed us with more excellent means. He  
has not spoken to us by his servant Moses,  
but by his onlybegotten Son Jesus Christ. He  
sent him into the world to deliver us from  
worse than Egyptian bondage, even from  
the servitude of sin, and from the wrath  
to come. His covenant with us is establish-  
ed on better promises, for he has not pro-  
mised us an earthly Canaan, but an heaven-  
ly and eternal kingdom. If we consider our-  
selves not only as Christians, but as natives  
of Great Britain, how many, how great  
are the advantages we receive from the re-  
formation? We are delivered from that yoke  
of popery, which our fathers could not bear,  
and happily enjoy our Bibles, and our christ-  
ian liberty. And what can be the end of  
God in giving us such plain rules of prac-  
tice, such gracious promises of assistance,  
such clear views of eternal blessedness, but  
our present and our future good? His great  
kindness in giving us all the advantages we  
enjoy, both as Christians and Britons, may  
assure us, that his intention is merciful and  
good. His will therefore must be, that we  
should acquire true knowledge by the christ-  
ian institution, *Who will have all men to be  
saved, and to come to the knowledge of the  
truth,* 1 Tim. ii. 4; that we should be  
brought

SERM. brought to repentance by the great motives

X. *set before us, for he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, 2 Pet. iii. 9; that we should be eternally happy, For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life, John iii. 16. Let there not be therefore in any of us an evil heart of unbelief, as there was in the Israelites. He patiently bore their other provocations, but when they wickedly surmised, that it was his design to destroy them in the wilderness, and that he never really intended, tho he promised by Moses, to bring them into Canaan; he was so highly provoked with them, that he swore in his wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. What then can more highly incense God, or more effectually deprive us of salvation, than to distrust the sincerity of his word; and to imagine, that notwithstanding all the gracious invitations of the gospel, he secretly intends not to save us by Jesus Christ? If we fear that he does not really intend our salvation, this may discourage us from those indeavours, which are necessary to obtain it, and so deprive us of the blessing of God: but if we believe, that it was the gracious purpose of God to save us by Jesus Christ, we may then cheerfully set ourselves to obey the gospel, in certain hopes of succeeding. Let us not therefore question the truth of his declarations, but*  
take



take care that we are not wanting to our-  
selves by neglecting that great salvation,  
which he is willing to confer upon us  
through Jesus Christ.

SERM.  
X.

2. HE gives men capacity to improve the means, which he affords them. This is plainly implied in these words, as you have heard, in any of those senses, which are agreeable to the design of Moses. Could the Judge of all the earth righteously blame and punish them for not knowing and performing their duty, if they had neither capacity to understand, nor to do what he required? He did not irresistibly move them, for this would have destroyed the virtue of their actions; but he gave them sufficient strength, for otherwise they could not have been left without excuse. What was there in the commandments God gave to the Israelites, which was above their ability? Why did they murmur and distrust, instead of believing in his word? Were not all those wonderful works of God, which they had beheld, sufficient grounds for their faith and trust in him? Could they not judge, that he, who had done such mighty works before their eyes, could likewise prosper their expedition, and put them in possession of Canaan in spite of all their opposers? And if we consider our own state, has not God abundantly inabled us to keep those commandments, which he has given us by his Son Jesus Christ? What man, who seriously

SERM. reads his Bible, can pretend to say, that he

X.

cannot understand what he must do to be saved? Is there not weight enough in the motives of the gospel, if duly thought upon, to overbalance all present considerations, which, in any circumstances, may incline us to neglect our eternal salvation? Is not the view of everlasting destruction sufficient to restrain us from the most pleasing and profitable vices? Is not the sure expectation of perfect and neverceasing blessedness enough to excite us to steadfastness in performing the most difficult duties of religion? And has not God promised to give the assistance of his spirit to them, who sincerely endeavour to do their duty, and that in a way proportionable to their necessities? We may then do all things, we may overcome the most powerful temptations, and practise the most difficult duties, through Christ, who strengthens us, if we neglect not ourselves. This leads me to observe what naturally arises from the true sense of the text,

3. THAT if the means of religion, which God gives men at any time, are ineffectual, it is intirely owing to their own fault. Their wilful negligence deprives them of his blessing, and is the only cause of their not obtaining true wisdom and happiness. This most certainly was the case of the Israelites, who died in the wilderness. Their inconsideration was the cause of their unbelief, and

and their unbelief the cause of their exclusion from the promised land. Deut. xxxii. X. S E R M.

29. *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.* Heb. iii. 9. *So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.* Their children also were inconsiderate, and therefore did not understand and obey the voice of the Lord. If they would have reflected with due seriousness on the miracles they had beheld, how could they have been so subject to fear, distrust, and unbelief? They are reproached with God's not giving them his blessings, because they refused them. Their guilt lay in making his means ineffectual by their stubbornness. This also was the folly and the crime of their posterity in the time of the prophets. No proper instructions and exhortations, no warnings nor other means were wanting; but they would not hear, and improve the means. They were like selfwilled patients, who will not take, but throw away those medicines, which might have cured them. Hos. vii. 1. *When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria.* The unbelief and destruction of the Jews in the time of our blessed Lord are always charged upon themselves. John iii. 9. *And this is the condemnation, says he, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* Ch. v. 40. *And*



SERM. *ye will not come to me, that ye might have*

X. *life. Acts xiii. 46. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary, that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.* And is not all this enough to convince us, that it is the fault of men, which deprives them of the blessing of God? They are ignorant, because they do not read and study the scriptures. They are overcome by temptation, because they do not watch against, and resist it with care and resolution. They are not prevailed upon by the motives of the christian religion, because they will not attentively consider, and keep them in mind. They are not saved, because they will not forsake their evil ways, nor walk in those paths of virtue, which lead to life eternal. However things appear to us, who cannot penetrate the hearts, nor view all the circumstances of men; if any are not converted from their vicious courses, and saved, there is something done or omitted by them, contrary to their knowledge and duty, which is the cause of their impenitency and destruction. For,

4. God will certainly give his blessing to those, who do not render themselves unworthy of it, by neglecting what is required on their part. This also is fully implied in the words of Moses, when he reproaches

the Israelites with the want of true wisdom S E R M.  
and virtue. For this evidently shews, that X.  
their own inconsideration and disobedience   
were the causes, why God did not give  
them these inestimable blessings; and conse-  
quently they might have obtained them, if  
they had considered better, and done what  
they ought. They, who now sincerely use  
the means of religion, may depend on the  
blessing of God. There is indeed an inse-  
parable connexion between the performance  
of our duty, and his blessing. For he who  
reads the Bible, with an honest mind, can-  
not but improve in divine knowledge. By  
resisting temptation, it is weakened and over-  
come. By endeavouring to do good, we be-  
come more perfect and stedfast in the prac-  
tice of virtue. By praying to God, we are  
made more humble and watchful, we ga-  
ther strength against all temptations, and fix  
the fear and love of God more deeply in our  
hearts. By living well, we are prepared and  
disposed for heaven, the sum of our wishes,  
and the crown of all our labors. We see  
therefore why the blessing of God is given,  
and why it is denied. To hope for it,  
while we neglect ourselves, is mere pre-  
sumption; but it always attends our sincere  
desires and endeavours. If we will not do  
what God requires as the condition of his  
blessing, we refuse it as much as if we re-  
jected it in words. Let us therefore seriously  
consider these things, and not deceive our-  
selves.

SERM. felves. That we are able to know, and do  
 X. good, is of the infinite goodness of God ;  
 { for, as St. James justly observes, *Every good  
 gift, and every perfect gift is from above,  
 and cometh down from the Father of lights*, ch.  
 i. 17. But let no man say, when he is tempted,  
*I am tempted of God: for God cannot be  
 tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any  
 man*, ver. 13. When we have done evil,  
 let us not say, as some profanely do, that  
 God did not give us grace to do better : but  
 let us acknowledge, that we did not well  
 consider, nor set ourselves to resist tempta-  
 tion ; that we neglected ourselves, and were  
 from thence overcome. To throw the blame  
 from ourselves on God is the way to pro-  
 voke his wrath, to lose his blessing, and to  
 harden ourselves in sin ; but to acknowledge  
 it to be our own fault, if we have not done  
 our duty, as our consciences will tell us it is,  
 will be a means to keep us humble, to make  
 us more circumspect and diligent ; which is  
 the way to obtain the divine assistance, to  
 become more holy, and to secure to our-  
 selves a blessed immortality.





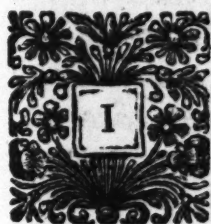
## S E R M O N XI.

Holiness the design of the gospel.

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TITUS ii. 11, 12.

*For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.*



IN the first verse of this chap- S E R M.  
ter, St. Paul directs Titus to XI.  
*Speak the things, which become  
sound doctrine; which things  
are, That the aged men be so-  
ber, grave, temperate, sound  
in faith, in charity, in patience: and that  
other Christians perform those duties, which  
belong to their age, relations, and circum-  
stances, as appears from the following verses.  
The reason he gives, why Titus should so  
diligently preach these things, is rendered in*

SERM. the text. The grace of God, which teaches

XI. us to renounce our sins, obliges us likewise  
 ~~~~~ to the practice of these duties. Grace properly signifies favor, and in the writings of the apostles expresses the free, unmerited goodness of God in sending his onlybegotten Son Jesus Christ to declare his will, and to redeem us from our iniquities by his own death. Sometimes the effects of this wonderful kindness of God, as the extraordinary gifts of the holy Ghost, and those special assistances, which were given to pious men in uncommon trials, are called grace. Rom. xii. 6. *Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.* 2 Cor. xii. 9. *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee.* Moreover the gospel itself, in which the great mercy of God in sending Jesus Christ is manifested to us, is sometimes expressed by the word grace. Col. i. 6. *Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world, and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.* And in this sense, I conceive, it may be understood in our text. When he says, the gospel, or, if you please, the grace of God manifested in the gospel, hath appeared to all men, he alludes to the appearance of heavenly bodies, which shine with great brightness and glory. Our blessed Lord is compared to a light shining in darkness,

darkness, John i. 5; and the apostles are SERM.
 said by Christ to be *the light of the world*, XI.
 Matt. v. 14. These words, *The grace of* 
God which bringeth salvation, hath appeared
to all men, seemed to our translators ambi-
 guous in the original. For tho they say in
 the text, *The grace of God hath appeared to*
all men; according to which sense, they
 may be understood of the gospel's being
 preached not only to Jews, and proselytes,
 but to all the nations of the world known
 at that time, Rom. x. 18. *But I say, Have*
they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went
into all the earth, and their words unto the
ends of the world: yet they have given a
 different turn to the words in their marginal
 reading, which is; *The grace of God, that*
bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared.
 And as the original will admit of this sense^a,
 so it is certainly agreeable to other scriptures,
 and to the gracious purpose of God, which
 is well expressed by St. Paul, *For this is good*
and acceptable in the sight of God our Sa-
viour: who will have all men to be saved,
and to come unto the knowledge of the truth,
 1 Tim. ii. 3. This grace of God, which
 offers salvation to all men, does not disin-
 gage Christians from any obligations they

U 4

are

^a In Xenophon we meet with σωτηριώτερον αὐτοῖς, more
 beneficial to them. Memorabil. Lib. iii. p. 765. Ed. Pa-
 ris. MDCXXV. The same author speaking of an horse,
 which he has described, says, he is σωτηριώτατος τῷ ἀμ-
 βᾶτι, most safe to the rider, or most for the safety of the
 rider. De re equest. p. 937. Ed. ejusd.

SERM. are under to live well ; but teaches us, *that*

XI. *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* These last words are a brief summary of the whole christian practice. For sobriety consists in the right government of our natural appetites and passions ; and includes therefore humility, temperance, contentment, chastity, selfdenial, and all those virtues, which more immediately concern ourselves. Righteousness comprehends all the duties, which we owe to our neighbours, as benevolence, mercy, charity, affability, forbearance, forgiveness, candor, justice, veracity ; and directs us in all things to give them the same treatment, which we reasonably expect from their hands, and to act according to the relation there is between us and them. Godliness consists in that high veneration, and those just conceptions we should entertain of the supreme Being, in prayer and thanksgiving, in loving and fearing him above all, in putting our trust in him, and humbly submitting to his will in all events. My design is not to explain distinctly, and at large, the several duties comprehended in these few words, but to consider the main point contained in them : which is, that the great end of the christian religion, or of the grace of God manifested to us in the gospel, is to make us holy. To explain this fully would require several discourses,

discourses, but at present I shall only prove SERM.
in a general way, XI.

I. THAT it is the design of the christian religion, or the grace of God manifested to us in the gospel, to make us holy.

II. THAT it is admirably fitted to answer this great and good end.

III. I SHALL conclude with some inferences, which will arise from this subject.

I. THE design of the christian religion, or the grace of God manifested to us in the gospel, is to make us holy.

THIS is declared to be one end, for which the blessed Jesus came into the world. When sin was once introduced by the transgression of our first parents, it increased so fast, that the knowledge of the true God, and of that rational service, which he required, was soon lost. And when men had departed from the true God, all manner of vice more and more abounded. The heathen were sunk so low in ignorance and vice, before the blessed Jesus came, that they could not recover the knowledge of the truth in the most important concerns of religion, nor reform their corruptions in worship and practice by any means.

SERM. means. The philosophers, who had better

XI. notions in some things than the vulgar, amused themselves with fine speculations; but made few attempts to reform their country, and those of little or no efficacy. They were born down by the torrent of evil customs, and supported the idolatry of the times by their own example. Their notions of God and another world were neither clear nor certain; so that they could not sufficiently support them under that ill usage, which they might bring upon themselves by attempting a reformation. And tho the Jews had the law of God, yet the Scribes and Pharisees, who should have been teachers and examples to others, were the great corrupters of the law; they were very nice in the observation of the ceremonial part, but omitted the weightier matters, judgment, mercy, and truth: insomuch that true piety was almost banished from this people, and wickedness generally prevailed and triumphed. At this time, when the whole world lay in wickedness, and there was no apparent hopes of any reformation, God was graciously pleased to send his own Son; and for what end can we suppose he sent him, but to teach men the knowledge and practice of true religion? 1 John iii. 8. *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* Acts iii. 26. *Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning*

turning away every one of you from his ini- S E R M.
quities. XI.

THIS end he always prosecuted in the whole course of his ministry by his private and publick discourses. He faithfully reprov'd men of every rank for their sins, and exhorted them all to repentance. In his excellent Sermon upon the mount, he has taught us the most pure and sublime morality, void of all ostentation, and influenced by the noblest principles of action. He took every occasion to teach men the practice of virtue, and to inculcate the necessity of obedience to the will of God in all respects. When it was told him, that his mother and brethren sought for him, he said, *Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother,* Mark iii. 35. When a certain woman said, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked:* he answered, *Yea rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it,* Luke xi. 28. When some told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, he said, *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,* Luke xiii. 3. When Martha entertained him at her house, and complained of her sister Mary for leaving all the care of providing to her, that she might attend his discourses; he took this occasion to shew, that religion was the most important affair of life, and commended her for choosing
this

SERM. this good part, Luke x. 42. At another

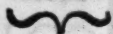
XI. time, when his disciples asked him, *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* he shewed them the necessity of mortifying their pride and ambition, and becoming humble, as little children, Matt. xviii. 1. In many other discourses, he shews us the necessity of mortifying covetousness and all inordinate lusts; of improving all our abilities in doing good, and living according to our holy profession, which is the design of those beautiful parables of the talents and the virgins. He did not therefore teach men, that they were under no obligations to keep the law of God, because he would make satisfaction for them: but inculcated the necessity of repentance, and a holy life, in order to obtain the pardon of their sins, and to become heirs of eternal life.

HIS own conversation was answerable to his discourses, and tended to promote a sincere regard to the will of God. He set a most perfect example of all those virtues, which are summarily comprehended in the words of the text. By that perfect command, he exercised over his natural appetites, by his great humility, notwithstanding all his divine abilities, by his contentment in the lowest circumstances of life, by that selfdenial, courage and patience, which he manifested in the greatest dangers and the most afflicted condition, he has taught us the practice of sobriety. By his benevolence
towards

towards all men, and his compassion to- SERM.
wards the miserable; by his affability to XI.
those, who came to him, and his going a-
bout doing good; by his justice to the per-
sons, characters and estates of men, several
instances of which occur in his life; by his
speaking the truth, when he knew it must
cost him his life; by his candor in putting the
most favorable construction on the actions
of his disciples, and kindly reproving them
when they had done amiss; by his praying
for his most inveterate enemies, when they
were doing him the greatest mischief, he
has shewn us the complete practice of righ-
teousness. And as to godliness, his pro-
found adoration of the Father, his many
acts of prayer and thanksgiving, his love to
him and zeal for his glory, his firm hope
and trust in him in the most trying circum-
stances, his intire resignation and submission
to his will in all events, clearly teach us,
wherein the exercise of it consists. He was
the most perfect pattern of all private, so-
cial, and divine virtues, which ever appear-
ed in the world; and has therefore by his
spotless life shewn us the practice and neces-
sity of holiness; that we ought to walk even
as he walked, and not vainly hope to enter
into his glory without imitating his pure and
heavenly conversation, according to our se-
veral abilities. He says therefore, *Learn of
me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.* And,
If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide
in

SERM. *in my love: even as I have kept my Fathers*

XI. *commandments, and abide in his love, John*



xv. 10.

ALL the doctrines and precepts of our blessed Lord have a tendency to promote holiness, and were undoubtedly given forth by him with a design to make men truly virtuous. What can more directly tend to promote a holy life than those notions of God, which we have learned from his religion? We believe in one God, who is a most pure and immense spirit; who is perfectly holy, as well as infinitely good; who views all our thoughts and actions, and is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with delight. As God therefore, who hath called us, is holy, so ought we to be holy in all manner of conversation. The notions, which the Gentiles entertained of their deities, might imbolden them in vice; but our belief in God tends to restrain us from sin, and engage us to the sincere practice of all virtue. No doctrine of our holy religion is merely speculative, but is designed to beget in us a holy disposition, and to lead us to a regular practice. In particular the doctrine of the resurrection and the future judgment teach us to keep our bodies undefiled, and to be upright in our whole conduct. For which reason St. Paul says, that because he had hope towards God; *That there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*, he therefore exercised himself to have
always

always a conscience void of offence toward God, SERM. and toward men, Acts xxiv. 15, 16. And XI.
as for the precepts of Christ, there is not one of them, but what forbids some sin, or commands either the practice of some particular virtue, or substantial piety in general. This is so obvious to every one, that I need not insist on particular instances. And what can be the design of such holy doctrines and laws, but to make all those, who believe in him, sincerely holy? Such excellent precepts surely were not given us to improve our knowledge only, but likewise to direct our practice. He gives no encouragement to any man to hope for salvation by him, unless he observes his laws in the general course of his life. For he declares, *Not every one, that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven, Matt. vii. 21.*

BUT from the incarnation, the discourses, the example, the doctrines and laws of Christ, let us procede to consider what was the end of his dying for us; whether he offered himself as a sacrifice for us upon the cross, that he might make atonement for our sins only; or whether it was not his view also to deliver us from the power of sin, and to make us holy. He must certainly design to purify us from sin, because this is absolutely necessary to remission. The guilt of sin, or obnoxiousness to punishment, is contracted by

SERM. by the violation of the divine law ; and we

XI. cannot therefore be acquitted from it, but
 must increase our guilt, while we continue
 in sin. He must therefore deliver us from
 sin, before we can possibly be forgiven ; and
 make us holy in order to our acceptance
 with God. And as this appears to be ne-
 cessary from the nature of things, so if we
 will be determined by the scriptures, it is
 there declared to be one end of his dying in
 our stead. Titus ii. 14. *Who gave himself
 for us, that he might redeem us from all ini-
 quity, and purify unto himself a peculiar peo-
 ple, zealous of good works.* His redeeming us
 from all iniquity is to be understood of his
 setting us at liberty from the dominion of
 sin, as plainly appears from the parallel
 words of St. Peter, 1 Epist. i. 18 : *Foras-
 much as ye know that ye were not redeemed
 with corruptible things, as silver and gold,
 from your vain conversation received by tra-
 dition from your fathers ; but with the pre-
 cious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without
 blemish and without spot.* This end of Christ's
 death is declared by the same apostle, ch. ii.
 24. *Who his own self bare our sins in his own
 body on the tree, that we being dead to sin,
 should live unto righteousness.* To the same
 purpose are the words of St. Paul, Gal. i. 4.
*Who gave himself for our sins, that he might
 deliver us from this present evil world, accord-
 ing to the will of God and our Father.* His
 intention therefore in dying for us was to
 recover

recover us from the power of sin, and to **SERM.**
 ingage us to walk in newness of life. And **XI.**
 his death indeed, considered as a sacrifice for
 sin, is most wisely adapted to answer this
 end; because it gives us the greatest incou-
 ragement to hope for mercy, if we truly
 repent: and at the same time shews us the
 utter impossibility of obtaining forgiveness,
 while we continue in a state of disobedi-
 ence. For if we could be accepted with
 God in a state of sin, why did his blessed
 Son suffer the ignominious death of the
 cross, that he might save us from our sins?
 I cannot now more largely shew what an
 excellent means of turning us from sin to
 God the death of Christ is, how many in-
 gaging motives to reformation and obedience
 it contains; but it is material to observe,
 that he did not only suffer death to deliver
 us from our sins; but also to complete that
 example of suffering virtues, which he had
 set us in the whole course of his humiliation.
 St. Peter therefore says, *For even bereunto*
were ye called: because Christ also suffered for
us, leaving us an example, that ye should fol-
low his steps. And if these were his ends in
 offering his life for us, is it not a great, a
 dangerous mistake for any persons to ima-
 gine, that they are not in duty bound to
 keep the law of God, because Christ made
 satisfaction for them? Is this reasonable? Is
 it not highly absurd? Is it not impossible?
 For if our creation, if every other instance

SERM. of divine goodness lays us under an obligation

XI. to gratitude, love, and obedience, the amazing love of God to mankind displayed in the death of Christ, the many great and most desirable blessings, which are conferred upon us in him, cannot possibly diminish and cancel the obligations we are under to obey the law of God, but must confirm and increase them. Thus St. Paul argues, *That he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him, which died for them, and rose again,* 2 Cor. v. 15. *For ye are bought with a price,* says the apostle in another place: *therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods,* 1 Epist. vi. 20. In whatsoever view therefore we consider the death of Christ, his design was to make us personally holy, as the only means of our recovering the favor of God, and being prepared for a state of eternal blessedness hereafter. And for this end he arose again and ascended into heaven, that by sending down the gifts of the holy Ghost, he might make the ministry of the apostles successful in turning men from idols to God, and from sin to the practice of holiness. He said therefore, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me,* John xii. 32. Tho the Jews crucified him, yet when he was risen again, he would by the mighty works done in his name propagate his doctrine through the whole world, and ingage men

men to obey his institution. His resurrection from the grave, and ascension into heaven, should induce us to moderate our affections towards present things, and to set them chiefly upon things above. Col. iii. 1. *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.* SERM. XI.

If we farther procede to consider the sanctions of his religion, the rewards which are annexed to the observation of his laws, and the punishments, which are denounced against the violation of them, we shall perceive, that their end likewise is to restrain us from sin, and to make us truly righteous. The promises of the gospel are designed to ingage us to renounce the pomps and vanities of this world, which cannot give us that intire satisfaction, we naturally desire; to lead holy lives, and go through all the trials of our virtue with resolution and steadfastness. This end of them is declared by St. Peter, 2 Epist. i. 4. *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* What their tendency is, what influence they should have upon all Christians is plain from St. Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear*

SERM. of God. The promises therefore of the gospel
 XI. are to move and excite us to the stedfast
 ~~~~~ practice of piety; and the end of those  
 threats, which are denounced against the  
 disobedient, is to preserve us from sin by  
 overbalancing all the allurements and terrors  
 of this world, when they are set before us.  
 Matt. x. 28. *And fear not them which kill  
 the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but  
 rather fear him which is able to destroy both  
 soul and body in hell.* All the grace of God  
 therefore manifested to us in the incarnation,  
 life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ  
 is designed to recover us from a state of sin  
 to a state of holiness; and this is not only  
 the natural tendency, but the declared end  
 of all his doctrines and precepts, of all the  
 promises and threats of his holy institu-  
 tion.

II. I PROCEED to shew that the christian  
 religion is admirably fitted to promote this  
 great and good end. And,

1. IT gives us the most easy, perfect, and  
 efficacious rules for the practice of virtue.

2. IT proposes to us the most proper and  
 prevailing motives to holiness of life.

1. IT gives us the most easy, perfect, and  
 efficacious rules for the practice of virtue.

WE are not left to trace out the know-  
 ledge of God, nor to collect our duty from  
 the

the relation of things by our own reason. **SERM.**  
For tho this may in some measure be done, **XI.**  
it requires more capacity and leifure, than   
most men are masters of. Besides, when  
persons have been long addicted to evil cus-  
toms, they have little or no inclination to  
such inquiries; and are so prepossessed with  
false notions, that they cannot certainly dis-  
cern the truth. This was the case of the  
politest heathen, before the advent of our  
blessed Lord. They were so bewildered with  
a multitude of opinions, so overborn by the  
prejudice of education and the power of  
evil customs, that they could not attain any  
certain knowledge of the true God, and of  
a future state, nor indeed of moral virtue in  
some respects: all which is abundantly plain  
from their own writings. And they, who  
are not able to consult them, may be satis-  
fied by reading the first chapter of St. Paul's  
epistle to the Romans, and other places of  
the new Testament. But the knowledge of  
these things is plainly delivered to us in the  
christian institution. What we should be-  
lieve concerning God, how we should wor-  
ship him, the fear and love, and other duties  
we owe to him; how we should behave  
towards all men, relations or neighbours,  
friends or enemies, superiors or inferiors;  
the government of our natural passions, and  
every duty, which concerns ourselves; what  
the future state of good and bad men will  
certainly be, are all laid down so plainly in the

SERM. discourses of Christ and his disciples, that

XI. men of the meanest capacity, the unlearned as well as the learned, may understand them without any difficulty. It sets all these things in so strong a light, that we evidently perceive the truth and reasonableness of that, which we should not have known, or been very uncertain about it, if we had been without the advantage of divine revelation.

MOREOVER his religion does not only give us more plain, but also more perfect rules for a holy life. For as to the extent of our duty, there is no moral evil, but what it forbids. There were several sins allowed of by some of the philosophers, but our blessed Lord requires us to *abstain from all appearance of evil*. His followers were forbid to do many things, which the heathen allowed. Eph. iv. 17. *This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind*. His religion indeed strikes at the root of all sin, because it forbids evil thoughts and desires, from whence evil actions procede. The Christian must mortify the lusts of the flesh, which is the most effectual way to preserve himself from evil actions. Gal. v. 24. *And they that are Christs, have crucified the flesh, with the affections, and lusts*. On the other hand there is no virtue, but what it commands. There are some virtues which the philosophers did not prescribe, but our religion teaches



teaches us the practice of every thing, which SERM.  
 is commendable and good. It does not only XI.  
 teach us to love our friends, but likewise our  
 enemies; and to do good to them, who  
 have used us ill. It directs us to lay no  
 more stress on things than the nature of  
 them requires; to observe positive institu-  
 tions as means of religion, and moral virtue,  
 as that, wherein it principally consists. Christ  
 therefore tells his disciples, *That except your*  
*righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of*  
*the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case*  
*enter into the kingdom of heaven.* He has  
 none of those loose maxims, which prevail-  
 ed among the Jews, who hoped to commute  
 for the neglect of other duties by observing  
 some great precept of the law; but them,  
 who were misled by such vain opinions, he  
 directs to the love of God and our neigh-  
 bour, because they who are influenced by  
 these principles, will observe all the duties,  
 which they owe to them. The religion of  
 our blessed Lord sanctifies the mind, and  
 does not only direct to good actions, but in-  
 fuses the best and most generous principles.  
 It shews us, that no religious actions will be  
 acceptable to God, if done from vain osten-  
 tation and sinister views; and that to please  
 him, we must be moved by sincere and  
 good intentions. Nothing therefore can be  
 more perfect than the rules, which he gives  
 us, for the command of our thoughts, and  
 the government of our actions; and conse-  
 quently

SERM. quently no institution can be better fitted to  
 XI. make men truly righteous.

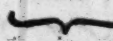
THE precepts of Christ are likewise most efficacious, because the divine authority is stamped upon them. The lectures of the philosophers were read to few, and had no authority to inforce them; and therefore their finest sentences had no weight upon the consciences of their auditors, because they were not received as the commands of God. But Christ and his apostles preached to all men, and delivered their doctrines and precepts as the will of God; and proved that they were really so, by the miracles which they did in his name. The wonderful works done by the apostles raised the attention of all considerate persons, and overcame their prejudices. They were hereby convinced, that their idols were no Gods; and that there was but one living and true God, by whose power these miracles were done; and that it was his will, they should renounce their sins, and obey his laws. Hence proceeded that surprising change, which was effected by the preaching of the apostles. They, who seriously considered their miracles, could not resist the evidence of them; but were prevailed upon to change their manners, as well as their notions, in obedience to the gospel. The apostles reasoned justly from the scriptures with the Jews, and from the nature of things with the Gentiles; but their reasonings could not have

have had so quick and so great success, if SERM. XI.  
 they had not been supported by their mira-  
 cles. By the means of these it was, that  
 so many converts were made in Jerusalem at  
 the feast of Pentecost, and in other places,  
 where the apostles preached in the name of  
 Jesus. To these St. Paul attributes his suc-  
 cess among the Thessalonians, 1 Thess. i.  
 5, 9. *For our gospel came not unto you in  
 word only, but also in power, and in the holy  
 Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know  
 what manner of men we were among you for  
 your sake.—For they themselves shew of us,  
 what manner of entering in we had unto you,  
 and how ye turned to God from idols to serve  
 the living and true God.*

2. THE christian religion proposes to us  
 the most proper and prevailing motives to  
 holiness of life. To persuade men to re-  
 pentance, what can be better suited than  
 the gracious promise of pardon made us by  
 Jesus Christ, and confirmed by his own  
 blood? We are not left to conjecture from  
 the attributes of God, that he will forgive  
 us after great, wilful, and longrepeated trans-  
 gressions; but we know it more certainly,  
 and more comfortably from the gospel of  
 Christ. Acts xiii. 38. *Be it known unto you  
 therefore, men and brethren, that thro this  
 man is preached unto you the forgiveness of  
 sins.* When men, who were conscious to  
 themselves of many heinous sins, both Jews  
 and Gentiles, were so well and so firmly as-  
 sured,



SERM. fured, that God would freely forgive all

XI.  their past offences, how great soever, upon a sincere amendment; how effectually must this move them to forsake their sins, and to lead better lives? Besides, this promise is not only suited in its own nature to win sinners to repentance, and to reconcile them to God; but the condition also, upon which this most desirable blessing of forgiveness is suspended, must have a great effect. For remission through the blood of Jesus Christ is promised to them only, who heartily repent of their sins. Acts ii. 38. *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the holy Ghost.* The christian institution gives no incouragement to such, as delight in their sins; tho it gives the greatest to them, who are truly penitent.

ANOTHER motive to holiness, which may not only animate our indeavours, but also keep under and overcome those doubts and fears, which arise either from the sense of our own weakness, or the temptations of this world, is the promise of the spirit. Much indeed may be done by those natural powers, which God has given us, if we seriously resolve to live well, and add suitable indeavours to our good resolutions. But when persons have been long enslaved to their sinful passions, they too often experience, that when they would do good, evil  
is

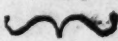
is present with them. In this case he, who SERM.  
sincerely endeavours to resist temptation, and XI.  
to reform his life, may hope for the assistance of God; but to have such clear and  
express promises, as are made to us in the  
gospel, is a mighty motive to resolution and  
perseverance. We may cheerfully set our-  
selves to work out our salvation, because we  
know, that God will prosper our sincere in-  
deavours by his blessing. By his grace, if  
we devoutly ask it, and honestly concur  
with it, we shall be effectually supported  
against all temptations, and difficulties. For  
what can be too difficult for Christians to  
perform, too hard for them to suffer, when  
God is with them, and assists them by his  
spirit? And this promise of divine assistance  
is also made us upon such conditions, as  
cannot but render it a great incentive to care  
and diligence. If God wrought upon men  
irresistibly, this might tempt them to sit  
still, waiting for his operations, and neg-  
lecting the use of those capacities and means  
he has given them; but since he has pro-  
mised his aid to them only, who faithfully  
exert their own best endeavours, it no less  
powerfully incites men to do their own part,  
than it encourages them to hope for all need-  
ful assistance. And that the gracious assis-  
tances of the holy Spirit are thus condition-  
ally promised, is evident from the whole te-  
nor of the Bible; for where these are pro-  
mised, there, or in other places, our own  
con-

SERM. consideration, resolution, and action are required. Phil. ii. 12. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, For it is God which worketh in you, both to will, and to do, of his good pleasure.* James iv. 7. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

To these motives may be added the threats and promises of the gospel, which have likewise a great tendency to promote this good end. The future misery, which it denounces as the just consequence of a wicked life, will far exceed all the trouble of mortifying our lusts, and all the evils, which can be inflicted upon us for a good conscience. How powerfully then should the belief of this restrain us from sin, and excite us to steadfastness in religion, that we may not, for fear of temporary evils, run upon everlasting destruction? On the other hand, the promise of eternal blessedness made to the obedient is no less proper to allure us to our duty, as might be shewn in divers respects, if we could at present distinctly consider them. The very nature of the future reward, as it is a state of perfect rectitude, calls us to purity; since we cannot be prepared for it, unless we are previously sanctified in this life. Besides, the transcendent excellency of the future glory makes it a most powerful incitement to virtue, because it will be inconceivably better, and more solid than any thing, which this changing world can bid for our affections.

Nothing



Nothing in this life, no present pleasures, SERM.  
advantages, or honors can make us amends XI.  
for the loss of eternal blessings; and there- 

fore whatsoever we lose on that account, we should take care to secure to ourselves a right to them through Jesus Christ. The promise of this complete and inconceivable felicity is likewise made to us upon such conditions, as cannot but strongly influence our practice: for eternal life is promised *to them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality*, Rom ii. 7. Such are the motives, which our holy religion proposes, in order to prevail with us to renounce our sins, and to live godly; and besides these, the grace of God in sending Jesus Christ to reveal his will to us, and to die for our sins; in assisting our indeavours to reform by his spirit, and forgiving our sins upon repentance, cannot but constrain us to love and gratitude, which are principles of obedience no less powerful than pure. St. John says, *We love him; because he first loved us*, 1 Epist. iv. 9. and *this is the love of God that we keep his commandments*, ch. v. 3. His inexpressible love manifested to us in Jesus Christ is not only a proper means to gain our affections to himself, but engages us likewise to love one another, as St. Paul observes, 1 Theff. iv. 9: and wherever these principles prevail, there every divine and social virtue will be observed. But,

SERM.

XI.

III. I SHALL conclude with some inferences, which arise from this subject.

I. FROM hence we may infer the truth of the christian religion. God is perfectly holy, and therefore no religion can be justly supposed to come from him, unless it tend to promote a holy life. But now supposing he was pleased to give mankind a revelation of his will, what other worship would he require, what other laws would he give forth, than those which our holy religion enjoins? We have therefore good reason to conclude, that Jesus came from God, because his religion teaches the most perfect practice of holiness. To his doctrine he justly appealed for the truth of his mission. John vii. 16. *Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* The purity of his doctrine is not indeed the only proof we have for the truth of his religion. The miracles which he did in the name of the Father, and which his disciples performed in his name after his ascension, most fully attest the truth of his religion; and shew that it is not only good in itself, but that he was truly sent from God to deliver it to men. And this external evidence was necessary, whether we consider the prejudices of some, or the weak capacities of others. They, who would not have attended to the internal evidences of his doctrine, were awakened by these stupendous works,

works, and convinced of the truth of his SERM.  
mission. XI.

2. WE are hence furnished with a good rule to try the doctrines of men, whether they are true or false. For if the grand design of the dispensation of the gospel is to make us holy, no doctrine can be Christ's, which has a contrary tendency. By their fruit we may know them, for if they tend to encourage men in sin, and tempt them to neglect their duty, they are certainly false; and yet such are many doctrines, which have prevailed among professed Christians. The popish doctrine of absolution, that the priest has power judicially to absolve from all past sins them, who shew some contrition at the point of death, is not a doctrine of Christ, because it tends to make men defer their repentance, and to live licentiously, hoping for the benefit of this absolution at last. And as to their doctrine of indulgences, what wickedness are they not capable of committing, who have received an indulgence for sins to come, as well as an absolution from sins past? These indulgences indeed do not only tend to harden men in sin, but have been often given on purpose to draw them into wicked undertakings. Their doctrine of purgatory is no less contrary to holiness; for if men can hope to be refined from their sinful corruptions by the flames thereof, and to be translated from thence to heaven by the prayers of the living, which



SERM. are to be purchased with money, will not

XI. this tempt them to neglect the mortification  
of their lusts, and sleep on securely in their  
beloved vices, while they live? But not to  
mention other popish doctrines, it must be  
confessed, that some things have prevailed  
among Protestants, which are not favorable  
to the great design of the gospel. To sup-  
pose, as some have done, that men can do  
nothing acceptable to God, till they are  
wrought-upon by irresistible grace, notwith-  
standing all the natural powers God has  
given them, and all the directions of his  
word, does not tend to ingage them to set  
about their duty; but rather to discourage  
them from it, if not to tempt them to go  
on in their sins, expecting this irresistible  
operation. In fact many, who have im-  
bibed this notion, are not ashamed to make  
it an excuse for delaying their repentance;  
which must be attended with the worst of  
consequences, as it cannot but offend al-  
mighty God, and confirm their vitious ha-  
bits; as it prevents those indeavours, and  
deprives them of that assistance, by which  
they might subdue their sinful passions, and  
reform their lives. And as it has not a good  
tendency, so it is manifestly contrary to  
those passages of scripture, which exhort  
sinners to repent and be converted; and  
consequently prove, that there is something  
for them to do in obedience to the word  
of God, as the condition of their being as-  
sisted

sisted by his spirit. The gracious assistance SERM.  
of God is not promised to supersede, but to XI.  
prosper our indeavours, as plainly appears  
from the words of St. Paul already quoted.  
But I will add no more Instances. By this  
rule you may try other doctrines, whether  
they are of God, or not.

3. FROM hence we may safely judge  
whether we are in a state of salvation.  
The ultimate end of the gospel is to make  
us eternally happy, and as a necessary means  
of effecting this, it designs to make us holy.  
If therefore we would have good reason to  
hope for eternal blessedness through Christ,  
we must not oppose, but concur with the  
gracious design of his religion. We must  
not place our affections chiefly on lower ob-  
jects, nor gratify the lusts of the flesh; but  
*follow peace with all men, and holiness, without  
which no man shall see the Lord, Heb. xii.*

14. He, who lives in obedience to God,  
may be assured that he is in his favor; but  
he, who liveth in wilful sin, is neither a  
child of God, nor an heir of eternal glory.  
For St. John says, 1 Epist. iii. 10. *In this  
the children of God are manifest, and the  
children of the devil: Whosoever doth not  
righteousness, is not of God, neither he that  
loveth not his brother.* If we live in love  
and in the practice of all holiness, we shall  
be fit for heaven and the communion of the  
saints above. Since the religion therefore,  
which we profess, is so holy, let us not dis-

SERM. honor it by a wicked life; but adorn the  
XI. doctrine of God our Saviour by a truly  
christian temper and conduct. And if in  
this world, we live soberly, righteously, and  
godly, we may look with comfort *for that  
blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of  
the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*  
and when he comes, we shall behold him  
with joy, and enter into his everlasting  
kingdom.



S E R M O N





## S E R M O N XII.

Real holiness more excellent and  
necessary than positive rites.

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MATTHEW xii. 7.

*But if ye had known what this  
meaneth, I will have mercy, and  
not sacrifice, ye would not have  
condemned the guiltless.*



**A**S true religion is the way to SERM.  
heaven, we should be ex- XII.  
ceedingly careful, that we do  
not mistake it; nor place so  
much in things, which are  
only means of it, as to neg-  
lect those, wherein it principally consists, and  
without the practice of which, we cannot  
be prepared for the joys of that blessed place.  
It is not indeed every mistake in judgment,  
which can ruin them, who are upright in  
heart, and holy in conversation; there being  
more in these things to fit men for the happy

SERM. state above, than there is in a speculative  
 XII. error to make them unworthy and incapable of it. But a practical error may be of worse consequence, and lead us to neglect those things, which are most necessary to our happiness in the world to come. A fatal mistake of this kind was committed by too many of the Jews before and in our blessed Saviour's time. They placed their religion chiefly in a nice and scrupulous observation of external rites, which made them neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. They valued themselves so much on their own righteousness, which consisted in rigorously observing the rites of the law, and the traditions of the Scribes, that they did not only censure others unjustly, but also allowed themselves in great immoralities. God indeed had given them various ceremonial laws, with a view to keep them from the idolatries of the Gentiles; but certainly he never designed, that they should add to them by their own traditions, or place their religion chiefly in things external. What he principally required of them was, that they should be holy as he is holy, which must include the rectitude of their wills, and regularity of their conduct. He always shewed them, that he would not accept of their oblations, if they lived wickedly, and that an obedient temper was more acceptable to him than all external service. 1 Sam. xv. 22. *Behold,*

to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, SERM.  
than the fat of rams. The same sense is ex- XII.  
pressed in other words, Psal. l. 13. *Will I*  
*eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of*  
*goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay*  
*thy vows unto the most high.* In the next  
Psalm, David addresses himself to God in  
these words, *For thou desirest not sacrifice,*  
*else would I give it: thou delightest not in*  
*burnt-offering.* *The sacrifices of God are a*  
*broken spirit,* ver. 16, 17. The judgment  
of Solomon in this matter was the same  
with that of his royal father. For he de-  
clares, that, *To do justice and judgment, is*  
*more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice:*  
and that, *The sacrifice of the wicked is an*  
*abomination,* Prov. xxi. 3, 27. Herein they  
do not give us their own judgment only,  
but teach us also the mind of God. For  
when the people lived in great wickedness,  
and hoped nevertheless to please him by a  
strict and formal obedience to the ritual part  
of the law; he shewed them by his pro-  
phets what little regard he had to these  
things, in comparison of true righteousness,  
which he chiefly required of them. Isaiah  
i. 11. *To what purpose is the multitude of*  
*your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am*  
*full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the*  
*fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood*  
*of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.* Thus  
he expostulates with them for several verses,  
and then shews them, why he would not



SERM. accept their sacrifices, nor hear their prayers; and what was more necessary to please him, than all external worship. *Your hands are full of blood. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.* Micah the prophet says, ch. vi. 6, 7, 8. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* To these passages I shall only add the words of Hosea, as quoted by our blessed Lord in the text now before us, ch. vi. 6. *For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God, more than burnt-offerings.* These words, *And not sacrifice*, must not be understood absolutely, for he did require sacrifices of them, and would graciously accept them, when offered with contrite and thankful hearts, with pure and righteous hands. This clause therefore must be understood comparatively, *I desired mercy more than sacrifice*, I did not only desire sacrifice, but chiefly required mercy at your

your hands. This is not only evident from S E R M. the nature of things, and other places of XII. scripture; but also from the subsequent clause, *And the knowledge of God, more than burnt-offerings.* Mercy seems to be used here in opposition to that oppression, of which the prophets frequently complain; but what is said of mercy is applicable to that holiness, which comprehends all moral virtues; as love and obedience to God, justice and equity in our dealings with men, temperance and chastity in the government of ourselves, as appears from the above-cited words of Samuel, David, and Solomon compared with this place. Under sacrifices are contained all positive rites, all external worship, and in general every thing, which is only a means of religion, as is evident from Isaiah i. 15: and from the use our blessed Lord makes of this passage on two occasions. First, when the Pharisees asked the disciples, *Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?* which was unlawful in their opinion; he justifies himself by telling them, that he conversed with sinners, as a physician does with sick people, that he may heal them. *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick,* Matt. ix. 12. And alleges also these words of Hosea in defence of his conduct in the next verse. *But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.* The conversion of sinners is here considered

SERM. by Christ as a work of mercy, and avoiding their company, as a means of religion, XII. which comes under the word sacrifice. Tho good men should not imprudently frequent the company of sinners, lest they be seduced by their evil example; yet this caution is only a means of religion to keep themselves holy, and therefore ought not to be so rigidly observed, as to neglect an opportunity of converting them, which is an act of great mercy. To reclaim a sinner from the evil of his ways, and convert him to the truth, is certainly better, than to shun his company from such a proud spirit, as prevailed in the Pharisees, who thought themselves more righteous than their neighbours; because they were more rigorous observers of external rites, tho they were at the same time full of all manner of iniquity. Again he brings this place to vindicate his disciples, when they plucked ears of corn, and eat as they walked through the fields on the sabbath day. The plucking ears of corn in a neighbour's field was allowed of by the law, Deut. xxiii. 25; and therefore they blame them not for that action, but for doing it on the sabbath, supposing it to be included in those things, which were forbidden on that day. But our blessed Lord justifies them by a known maxim, that where two laws interfere, so that both of them cannot be observed, the lesser must give way to the more important. He proves this by allowed examples,



examples, which might have more weight SERM.  
with them, than bare reasons. David eat XII.  
of the shewbread in a case of necessity, of  
which none but the priests might ordinarily  
eat; it being better to preserve life, than  
strictly to observe the positive injunction in  
that respect. The priests likewise did many  
things in the temple on the sabbath, which  
were not esteemed breaches of that day,  
because necessary to the discharge of their  
function. To these authorities he adds that  
of Hosea: *I will have mercy, and not sacri-*  
*fice*; which is very justly applied to the pur-  
pose in hand. For his disciples were in-  
gaged in preaching the gospel of peace,  
which was a work of great mercy to all  
men; and therefore it was better to prose-  
cute it with vigor, than to neglect it, that  
they might prepare for the sabbath with the  
same strictness as the Scribes. From hence  
therefore it appears, that God is better  
pleased with the practice of real holiness,  
than with the observation of positive rites;  
and that whenever these interfere the one  
with the other, the former must take place  
of the latter. The reason, why ~~they are~~  
~~more~~ acceptable to God, and ought to be  
more regarded in practice, is, because ~~they~~  
~~are~~ more excellent and necessary in ~~them-~~  
~~selves.~~ It was therefore a great fault in the  
Jews to shew less regard to moral righteouf-  
ness than to the rituals of their law. These  
indeed they ought to have observed, with a  
view

it is/  
it/  
it self/

SERM. view to the true ends of their appointment ;

XII. but yet they should have had more regard to the moral precepts, as more acceptable to God, and more necessary to their happiness. That we may always have most regard to that, which is principally required of us, I shall endeavour to make out these two things from the words before us.

I. THAT real holiness is more excellent in itself than positive rites.

II. THAT it is also more necessary on all accounts, whether we consider it with respect to our present, or to our future state.

BEFORE I enter upon these heads, in order to prevent any misconstruction and abuse of what I am going to say ; give me leave to observe, that an extreme on either hand is to be avoided with the utmost care. Tho positive duties are not so excellent and necessary as moral virtue, yet they are not for this reason to be meanly thought of and neglected. Our blessed Saviour has taught us by his own practice to obey the whole will of God, whether what he requires be of a moral, or of a positive nature. The sincerity of a Christian is shewn by keeping all the commandments of God, and his wisdom should be manifested by laying just so much stress upon every one, as the nature of it requires.

requires. As we should not lay so much SERM.  
stress on the positive precepts of Christ, as XII.  
to neglect the weightier matters of the go-  
spel; so neither should we slight positive du-  
ties under a pretence of zeal for moral holi-  
ness. Why the sacraments instituted by our  
blessed Lord should be slighted at present,  
I cannot conceive. For, to omit other con-  
siderations, by which the usefulness of them  
might be demonstrated, if we consider them  
not only as obligations to obedience and  
means of holiness to particular Christians;  
but also as designed to preserve the christian  
name and religion in the world, I cannot  
see but the more distant we live from the  
times, in which our blessed Lord appeared,  
the more necessary it will be to observe them  
in the christian church, in order to answer  
the great ends of their institution. But  
to return to the subject, which the text  
leads me to consider, I observe,

I. THAT real holiness is more excellent  
in itself than positive rites. And this will  
plainly appear,

I. BECAUSE it makes us like to God.  
He necessarily exists, and is therefore abso-  
lutely perfect, not only eternal, almighty,  
and most wise; but likewise pure, righte-  
ous, and good. It is certainly greater per-  
fection always to will, and do what is right  
and good, than ever to incline to, or act  
the contrary. God therefore, who is most  
perfect,



SERM. perfect, is pure from all moral imperfection;  
 XII. and never judges, wills, or acts, what is not  
 according to truth and righteousness. *There is no unrighteousness in him*, says the Psalmist, Psalm xcii. 15; or according to St. John, *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*, 1 Epist. i. 5. It is the excellency of his being, that he *cannot be tempted with evil*, as St. James observes, ch. i. 13. He cannot be mistaken in what is just and good, because his knowledge is infinite; nor have any inclination to act contrary thereto, because he is perfectly happy. He is therefore always represented as holy, or ever acting according to the rectitude of his nature, and the eternal laws of right reason. *Be ye holy, for I am holy*, Levit. xi. 44. He is infinitely kind and beneficent, merciful and long suffering; for, *The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works*, Psalm cxlv. 9. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy*, Psalm ciii. 8. He is righteous and just in all his dealings with men. *For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*, Psalm xi. 7. He is true and faithful, declaring nothing to be his will, but what is really so; and ever making good his promises to such, as keep his commandments. Deut. xxxii. 4. *A God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he*. And the author of the epistle to the Hebrews encourages them to steadfastness in religion, by assuring them, that, *He is faithful*

*ful that promised*, ch. x. 23. All his affec-  
 tions and actions are guided by his infinite  
 knowledge and perfect rectitude; according  
 to the state and behaviour of his creatures.  
 For as St. Paul justly observes, 2 Tim. ii. 11.  
*He cannot deny himself*: that is, he cannot  
 do any thing contrary to his nature and per-  
 fections, or to his word and promises. He  
 will therefore *render to every man according*  
*to his deeds*; for *there is no respect of persons*  
*with God*, Rom. ii. 6, 11. And as God is  
 most perfect, and the creator of all beings;  
 so they must be more or less excellent, as  
 they more nearly approach to, or more  
 widely differ from his blessed nature. And  
 therefore they, who act contrary to reason,  
 and are led by any temptations to do what  
 is impure, unmerciful, and unjust, are un-  
 like to him. The farther they procede in  
 their vitious courses, the more the image of  
 himself, which he originally stampd upon  
 them, is defaced and lost. Nor can any  
 thing restore it, but the renewing of their  
 minds, and the reformation of their lives.  
 If we mortify our sinful appetites, and bring  
 all our thoughts and desires in subjection to  
 our reason; if we are pure, and merciful,  
 and just in our temper and actions, we are  
 transformed into his likeness, and more near-  
 ly resemble him, as we make farther ad-  
 vances in a holy life. In his moral perfec-  
 tions we are commanded to imitate him.  
*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be*  
 ye

SERM. *ye holy in all manner of conversation,* 1 Pet.

XII. i. 15. Our blessed Lord more particularly  
 ~~~~~ requires us to be merciful, *as our Father is merciful,* Luke vi. 36. When he teaches us to shew kindness to enemies, as well as to friends, he proposes the example of God, Matt. v. 48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to be followers of God as dear children, which was to be done by shewing kindness, and forgiving one another, as appears from the connexion of these words with the last verse of the fourth chapter. *And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* And men are said to be born of him, and to be his children, when being renewed by his word and spirit they are made righteous, as he is righteous. In all holy and kind dispositions, in all just and merciful actions, we may and do resemble God; but how can we resemble him by the mere performance of external rites? What was there in circumcision, or in sacrifices, what is there in being baptized, or in eating bread and drinking wine, which bears any similitude to the nature and actions of the Deity? If they oblige and help us to live godly, and excite us to the practice of charity and justice, they tend to restamp his image upon our minds: which consists not in these external performances, but in that inward purity,


rity, and righteous conduct, to which they SERM.
are assisting. The moral precepts of God XII.
are conformable to his own nature, and in
obeying them we transcribe his perfections
into our own hearts and lives; but in ritual
observances we only shew obedience to his
commands. We resemble him in the for-
mer, but not in the latter; on which ac-
count they must be allowed to be the more
excellent.

2. FROM hence results another considera-
tion, which clearly demonstrates, that real
holiness is preferable to all instituted rites.
For being conformable to the perfections of
God, who necessarily exists, and is immu-
table, it must be good in itself. The love
and fear of God, mercy and justice towards
men, and other moral virtues were not in-
different in themselves, before they were in-
joined by the written law of God; but are
founded in the nature of things, and conse-
quently were good in themselves, antece-
dently to any positive command. There is
a real difference between virtue and vice,
the former being agreeable, the latter disa-
greeable, to the relation we stand in to God,
and to one another. This is evident from
the general sense of mankind. For men of
all nations, however they may differ in lan-
guage and customs, in speculative opinions
and modes of worship; yet all agree in these
things, that we ought to love and reverence
God, and acknowledge our dependence upon
him

SERM. him by prayer, and thanksgiving; that chil-

XII. dren should honor their parents, and parents
 take care of and provide for their children; that every man ought to be true to his word and promise, upright in his dealings, compassionate to the distressed; and in a word, to give that treatment to others, which he reasonably expects from their hands; that we ought to govern our natural appetites and passions, and to be mild, sober, and chaste. Now they never met together to establish these notions for political ends, but tho they lived in the most distant climates, and never had any intercourse; yet with one voice they pronounce virtue to be good, and vice to be evil. And whence can this proceed, but from that reason, with which they are all indowed, and by which they perceive the decency, fitness, and usefulness of the former; the turpitude, unfitness, and hurtfulness of the latter? Every one of us may be convinced of this by what passes in his own mind. We plainly perceive some things to be decent and praiseworthy, others to be undecent and deserving blame. We discern some actions to be suitable, others unsuitable to those relations, which are between our Creator and ourselves; between us and our fellow creatures. Can any man, who will seriously reflect, persuade himself, that it is not evil to blaspheme God, to curse his parents, to oppress the innocent, or to intoxicate himself with strong liquors; that
 on

on the other hand it is not good to re- SERM.
rence his Maker, to be dutiful to his pa- XII.
rents, to relieve the distressed, and to keep 

himself sober? Virtue has not only the suffrage of wise and good men, but even of the inconsiderate and vitious: for these commend those virtues, which they do not practise, and confess the turpitude of those vices, to which they are addicted. Nor ought this to be thought strange, for tho men will not hearken to reason, but follow their headstrong passions; they cannot easily overcome those natural instincts, nor suppress those notions of good and evil, which the great Creator has planted in their minds. When they have done good, they are pleased with themselves; but when they have done evil, they are ashamed, even before they reason much about their actions. But if any one thinks there is no real difference between actions in themselves, and that all the obligation to virtue arises from custom; let him tell us how custom came so generally to prevail, if it was not founded upon reason. Let him suppose all the potentates in the world conspiring to forbid the practice of virtue upon the severest penalties; to command all men to hate God and their parents, to be unmerciful to the poor, and to use deceit in their dealings; to give themselves up to impure lusts, and constantly to indulge themselves with the greatest excesses: would not mankind in general abhor and protest a-

SERM. gainst such monstrous edicts? Could such
 XII. laws ever take place, and make vice as commendable and useful, as virtue is at present; or virtue as disgraceful and pernicious, as vice is now esteemed and experienced to be? Would men, who acted contrary to such injunctions, feel the same remorse of conscience, the same inward shame, and dread of the supreme Being, as they do, when they commit what is called sinful at present? But tho they could gain the compliance of men, and by their authority and severities compel them to practise vice, and abandon virtue; yet this would not change the nature of things, nor make that, which is seemly and good, appear unseemly and evil. The nature of things is inflexible, and will not ply to humor and inclination, nor bend to the will and edicts of the mighty. After all, gratitude, love, and reverence will be suitable; unthankfulness, hatred, and irreverence unsuitable to the relation between the Creator and his rational creatures: truth, honesty, mercy and justice will be for the good; falsehood, knavery, oppression and injustice for the hurt of society. Can idleness and luxury, murder and theft, strife and discord, bribery and corruption with other wicked and impious actions promote the happiness of a people, and put a kingdom into a flourishing state? Can any thing make disobedience to parents, ingratitude to benefactors appear with that fitness and beauty,

beauty, which we now discern in the contrary virtues? What can make pride seem as lovely as humility, or render lewdness and excess in drinking, as healthful to our bodies, as chastity and temperance? It is impossible, we see, that vice should be good for men, or become those relations, in which they are placed. Virtue therefore is good in itself, but this cannot be affirmed of positive rites, which are indifferent in themselves, and no otherwise good than as they are appointed of God. Could any man's reason tell him, that he ought to be circumcised, if it had not been required? Would there be any religion in baptism, if it had not been instituted by Christ? The action in these and other rituals is neither good nor evil in itself, and therefore was not obligatory before the command was given, and has no goodness in it, if not done in obedience to the institution. Hence likewise it follows,

3. THAT real holiness is more excellent than positive rites; because, as it is good in itself, it is of perpetual obligation: whereas they are only instituted for a time, and as they were not in force before their institution; so they will be layed aside, when the reason of that ceases. All moral duties are ever binding, because the reason of them ever subsists. We continually depend upon our Creator, and every day receive fresh bounties from his hands; for which reason we are obliged to pray without ceasing, and

SERM. to bless his name for the several emanations
XII. of his love and goodness. Nothing can possibly discharge us from the duties of love and thanksgiving. The more we understand of his perfections, and the longer we enjoy his blessings; the greater cause shall we have to adore him, and to return him thanks. Every kind action of his providence, every new accession of outward blessings, our growth in knowledge and virtue, by the use of those means he affords, and the assistance of his spirit, should heighten our affection to him, and give new life to our devotions. His infinite power and wisdom will ever make it reasonable to fear him, and to submit to his will as wise and good. Thus likewise the same duties will always arise from the same relations between men. It ever was, and ever will be reasonable for children to honor their parents, and for all men to be kind and good to their several relations. We always expect, that other men should be honest in their dealings with us, and shew kindness to us in our distress; and must therefore acknowledge, that we are always obliged to behave towards them in the same manner. Such also is the state and condition of men in this life, such the frame and constitution of their minds and bodies, that they will always be under an obligation to practise those duties, which concern themselves. They must keep their desires and passions within the bounds of reason, and live

live chafly and soberly, if they will con- S E R M.
sult their own good. They cannot loose XII.
the reins to their natural appetites, and let
them run into excess, but it will disturb
their minds, wound their reputation, and
impair their health. They can have no
lasting satisfaction in themselves, no com-
fortable injoyment of God, if they do not
rightly govern their natural inclinations, and
are not humble and meek, pure and sober in
their temper and practice. And as moral
duties are in their own nature always obli-
gatory, so they have ever been required of
men under all dispensations. From the be-
ginning of the world they were obliged to
do justice, to shew mercy, and to walk
humbly with God. The Jews were bound
to live soberly, righteously and godly, be-
fore the ceremonial law was given them.
Jer. vii. 22. *For I spake not unto your fathers,
nor commanded them in the day that I brought
them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-
offerings, or sacrifices. But this thing com-
manded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I
will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and
walk ye in all the ways that I have command-
ed you, that it may be well unto you.* The
excellent Grotius supposes the prophet has
an eye to what Moses said to the people
of Israel, when he had made the waters of
Marah sweet. *If thou wilt diligently hearken
to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do
that which is right in his sight, and wilt give*

SERM. *ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes; I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians, Exod. xv. 26.* But as the express words of Jeremiah are neither contained in this, nor in any one particular place, I am more inclined to think, that he refers to the mind of God as declared in several places of the books of Moses. And from hence some ancient christian writers have infered, that God only required obedience to his moral precepts of the Jews, when they came first out of Egypt; and that the law of ceremonies and sacrifices was afterwards given for reasons peculiar to those times, especially to keep them from idolatry; to which they shewed a great proneness, when they made the molten calf. However, it is certain from hence, that what God principally required of them was obedience to his will; and that he was better pleased with the practice of righteousness, than with all external observances. When their various rites had answered the end of their institution, they were abolished by the death of Christ. But the moral part of the law is still in force, not indeed as given to them, but as binding in itself to all men. With respect to this chiefly our blessed Lord said, *Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.* He has given us two positive rites only, but requires of us greater perfection in holiness,
in

in proportion to the greater advantages and SERM.
incouragements of his religion. The great XII.
end of his institution is to make us more
devout towards God, more beneficent to
one another, more pure and holy in our
whole conduct, than they could be, who
lived under more imperfect dispensations.
Add to all this, that even when we are past
this state of probation, and are arrived at
heaven, holiness will be our duty and exer-
cise, as well as our pleasure and happiness.
We shall then be under more and greater
obligations to adore and love God for all the
blessings of creation and redemption, and
for the wonderful improvement of our na-
ture and happiness, which we shall there
attain. There charity will not fail, but our
affections will be more firmly united, and
our love to one another uninterrupted. There
we shall be more obliged, as well as better
disposed, to love: for if we ought here to
love one another, because God has loved us;
how much more shall we be obliged by this
reason, when we enjoy the utmost effects of
his love in the realms above? And when
this natural and mortal body is made spiri-
tual, and has put on immortality, all irre-
gular appetites will be totally subdued; and
we shall be made as pure and perfect as the
angelical orders. So unchangeable is the
nature of moral virtue. It was obligatory
previously to revealed religion, and will en-
ter into heaven, where it will constitute the

SERM. temper, practice and happiness of the blessed.

XII. But as for positive rites, they were not binding, till the precept for observing them was given forth, and have been altered according to the several dispensations, under which God has placed mankind. Those of Moses are now done away, and there will be no occasion for any in heaven. What need can there be of these means of religion, when we are made perfectly holy? But I procede. From hence it appears,

4. THAT moral virtue is required for its own worth and goodness, but positive rites are enjoined only with respect to that, as means of religion. The several duties comprehended under piety, righteousness and sobriety being good in themselves, and tending naturally to perfect our being, this alone is a reason why they should be enjoined, when a revelation was given to mankind. They are not required in order to make us more exact in the observation of outward ceremonies; but these having no goodness in them antecedent to the time of their appointment, are therefore only commanded, as they may be subservient to real holiness, and ingage us to good works; as they may put us in mind of our obligations to live well, and be means of improving in us true piety and righteousness. Religion therefore consists properly in the love of God and of our neighbour, and in those particular duties, which are contained under these summary laws. St. James says,

says, *Pure religion and undefiled before God* SERM.
even the Father, is this, To visit the father- XII.
less and the widow in their affliction, and to
keep himself unspotted from the world, ch. i.

27. The grand design of the gracious dispensation of the gospel is to purify us more from all sin, and to perfect our moral virtues. *The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,* Titus ii. 11. But positive institutions are to be considered as means of religion, as they may be useful to confirm and improve pious and good dispositions in our hearts, and call us to the exercise of faith, love, and other virtues. The paschal supper was appointed, that the Jews might remember their great deliverance, when all the first born of the Egyptians were destroyed, but their own were spared; and from thence might be induced to confide in God by a solemn commemoration of his past goodness. They were to offer up their first fruits, and to bring other oblations to God, that they might thankfully acknowledge him to be the author of all their blessings. Their sinofferings were designed to ingage them to make that confession of their guilt, and to excite them to that amendment of their lives, which were necessary to their forgiveness. The great end of the christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper is

SERM. is to oblige us to live well, and improve us

XII. in the christian temper and practice. The former is not only an apt and publick signification of our repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ, but is likewise a solemn ingagement to walk in newness of life. Rom. vi. 4. *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* The latter is designed to inflame our hearts with divine love by meditating on the grace of God displayed in the death of Jesus Christ; and to improve us in all holiness, by calling us frequently to consider of our ways, and renew our vows of obedience to Christ. The end therefore of all external rites is to ingage us to the practice of real holiness, and they have no more worth, than they derive from their fitness and expediency to promote moral virtue.

Now real holiness being in all these respects more excellent than external means and ordinances, this is a very good reason why it should be preferred to them, and take place of them; why, when one law clashes with another in any particular circumstances, we should rather omit a positive injunction, than neglect a moral duty; why the doing of justice and mercy should be regarded before sacrifices, or any other like ritual observances. But then nothing can justify the omission of a positive institution,

tion, but the necessity of neglecting some S E R M.
moral duty, if it is observed. It is not our XII.
knowledge, that moral virtue is better than in-
stituted rites, which can excuse our neglect of
them; the omission of them being then only
excusable, when they interfere with moral
duties. They are appointed as means to in-
gage us to piety and good works, and it
would therefore be very wrong to neglect
mercy and justice, that we may strictly ob-
serve them: but then as they are designed
to be means of religion, so we should ob-
serve them as such, when there is no clashing
between them, and the weightier mat-
ters of the law. To neglect them in such
circumstances would be to throw contempt
on the authority and word of God; and in-
deed upon true holiness itself, which they
are designed and adapted to promote. My
end therefore in discoursing from these words
is no other than what, I presume, was the
design of our blessed Lord in pronouncing
them, to prevent our depending too much
on the external part of religion, that we
may not vainly hope to atone for the neg-
lect of moral virtues by a strict observation
of positive rites: but by no means to in-
courage a wilful disobedience to the positive
institutions of our holy religion, which were
appointed for moral ends, and are admirably
fited to preserve and promote in us the spiri-
tual life. In order to prepare ourselves for
them, we must truly repent of our sins,

SERM. and form sincere resolutions of obedience ;

XII. we must review our past lives, and affect
our hearts with a due sense of the love of
God. In them we solemnly renounce the
love of this world, and devote ourselves to
God ; we devoutly meditate on the suffer-
ings of Jesus Christ and his wonderful love
to mankind ; we imploy our thoughts in
other exercises, which cannot but elevate our
hearts to things above, and raise us to higher
degrees of spirituality. By them we oblige
ourselves to mortify all inordinate desires
after present things, and to live in the prac-
tice of all christian virtues ; which cannot
but purify us from sin, confirm us in a state
of holiness, and raise us to higher attain-
ments in the christian life. They are not
therefore such mean and low things, as some
would make us believe ; but include many
spiritual exercises, and are excellent means
of holiness. The inferences from this sub-
ject must be reserved, till I have gone through
the second head, which I proposed to treat
of from these words, namely, That real ho-
liness is more necessary than the observation
of external rites, whether we consider it
with respect to our present, or to our fu-
ture state.

S E R M O N



S E R M O N XIII.

Real holiness more excellent and
necessary than positive rites.

MATTHEW xii. 7.

*But if ye had known what this
meaneth, I will have mercy, and
not sacrifice, ye would not have
condemned the guiltless.*



HAVE explained these words S E R M. XIII.
in a former discourse, both from the books of the old Testament, and the use our blessed Lord makes of them upon this, and another occasion. And from thence I observed, that the practice of real holiness, which consists in living godly, righteously and soberly, is far more acceptable to God than the most careful observation of ceremonial rites, and the exactest performance of the external parts of religion. It is more acceptable to him,

SERM. him, and ought to be more regarded by us,
 XIII. because it is more excellent and necessary in
 ~~~~~ itself than positive institutions. These two  
 things I proposed to make out from these  
 words. And,

I. THAT real holiness is more excellent  
 in itself than positive rites, was proved by  
 these four considerations.

1. IT tends to make us like God, who  
 is perfectly holy, and always does what is  
 according to mercy, goodness, truth, and  
 justice; but ritual actions bear no resem-  
 blance to his nature and attributes.

2. FROM hence it follows, that it is good  
 in itself, antecedently to any positive com-  
 mand; whereas the other are indifferent,  
 till the divine command is given forth.

3. IT is of perpetual obligation, but po-  
 sitive rites are only instituted for a time, and  
 cease therefore, when that time is expired.  
 And,

4. THIS shews, that it is required for its  
 own worth, without any view to make us  
 more exact in ceremonials; but these are  
 enjoined for the sake of real holiness, as in  
 some circumstances, and upon certain occa-  
 sions, they may be useful to improve us in it.  
 I procede now to shew,

II. THAT

*and necessary than positive rites.*

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II. THAT the practice of real holiness is also more necessary than the observation of positive rites, whether we consider it with respect to our present, or to our future state.

SERM.  
XIII.  
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THIS follows indeed from what has been advanced under the former head. We are indowed with understanding, that we may discern between things, and judge which of them is best; and should therefore prefer, and do that, which is most excellent. We cannot act worthy of our nature, nor agreeable to our real sentiments, if we shew most regard to that, which is of least worth and value; and make not that our chief delight and practice, which has the most intrinsic goodness. To be very strict and precise in that, which is in every respect least considerable, and at the same time remiss and unconcerned about things far more valuable, is highly absurd, and a just reproach to our understanding. It is just as if a man should be very exact and nice in his dress, and take no care of his health, which is a much more excellent good. As reason directs us to judge that to be most necessary in practice, which is most excellent in itself; so our holy religion, tho it requires an universal obedience to the will of God, yet it teaches us to lay more stress upon moral righteousness, than upon external ceremonies. *Except your righteousness shall exceed the*  
*righte-*

SERM. *righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye*

XIII. *shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven,* is the declaration of Christ, Matt. v. 20.

Their righteousness chiefly consisted in a rigid observation of the ceremonial part of the law, and ours consequently should principally consist in a sincere practice of the moral duties of religion. If we would therefore make a right use of our reason, and act up to the dignity of our christian profession, we should in our choice and practice most regard that, which is most worthy. But I shall procede to other reasons. And,

I. IT is more necessary to recover us from the injuries of the fall, and to raise us gradually to the just perfection of our being. Man was at first created in a state of innocence, or *made upright*, as Solomon observes, Eccles. vii. 29. He had a clear knowledge of his duty, and had no bias to evil upon his will. His reason was not subject to his appetites, nor his mind disturbed by irregular passions. He had indeed a natural desire of happiness implanted in him, and was indowed with liberty, that he might be capable of government. Being thus constituted, he had a law given him, and was placed in a state of trial. And had he withstood the tempter, and been confirmed in his obedience, he would have become more perfect in proportion as he was more fixed in a state of holiness. But deceived with false hopes of enjoying greater felicity, he loosed the



reins to his desires, and tasted of the forbidden fruit. By thus suffering his senses to usurp the dominion over his reason, he lost his original innocency and rectitude; and, for the punishment of his crime, was turned out of paradise into a state of less happiness, and greater trials. His reason was weakened by yielding, and his appetites grew stronger by overcoming. Thus human nature was debased, sin introduced into the world, and propagated by evil examples; and therefore Solomon adds, *But they have sought out many inventions.* By giving way to temptations, and repeating the gratification of their evil inclinations, men contract vitious customs; and where vitious customs prevail, the order of nature is perverted; reason, which should govern the appetites, is dethroned, and the appetites, which should obey reason, bear rule. The lower they are sunk in vice, the more is their nature debased. Their reason is not only captivated and enslaved, but their understanding also is weakened and impaired by evil customs. They judge ill, because they are guided by their vitious passions; and procede so far many times as to call good evil, and evil good, as the prophet has observed. They put off their own nature, as it were, and become brutish by following their senses; for which reason impure, crafty, and cruel men are compared in the Bible to swine, foxes, and wolves. And as our nature

SERM. ture is gradually corrupted by the prevalence of evil lusts, and a custom of sinning; XIII. so it must gradually recover itself, and rise to its full perfection by the practice of holiness. When a man is renewed in his mind, and has mortified his sinful appetites, he recovers that command over his thoughts, that liberty of action, which he had in a great measure lost. He has inward peace and tranquillity, which is certainly a better state, than when he was stung with remorse, and full of uneasy reflexions. His thoughts are more nobly employed in meditating on God and good things, in forming pious resolutions, and contriving how to be useful, than when they were taken up with vain imaginations, and wicked designs. A pure heart is more excellent than one defiled with various lusts, and a devout mind infinitely better than one alienated from God, the supreme good. A meek and quiet spirit is more ornamental than a rough and angry temper. The practice of benevolence, justice, and other social virtues; of humility, temperance, and such others, as concern ourselves, improves and dignifies our nature as much as the contrary vices debase and dishonor it. The more intirely therefore all our senses and passions are subjected to our reason, and the greater progress we make in every moral virtue, the greater perfection we attain. But this perfection is not to be obtained by the mere observation of external rites.

rites. A man may be very strict in these SERM.  
things, and yet remain ignorant of true re- XIII.  
ligion, and be a wretched slave to his pas-  
sions. For they have no tendency to im-  
prove our nature, any farther than they give  
us occasion to exercise faith, love, and other  
virtues, and ingage us to the practice of ho-  
liness. But the perfection of our being con-  
sists in the strength of our virtuous habits,  
and in the regularity of our righteous ac-  
tions; and as we are more confirmed and  
perfected in these, we advance in the excel-  
lency and dignity of our being. We have  
not only more enjoyment of ourselves, and  
possess more excellent qualities; but we also  
become more useful in the world. We con-  
tract a greater likeness to the angelic orders,  
those pure and benevolent beings; nay, we  
approach more nearly to the nature of God  
himself, who is most perfectly holy, and  
supremely beneficent: and thus we shall  
gradually improve in real worth, till we  
rise to that blessed state, where we shall  
not only outshine our first parents in their  
original make, but be unchangeably holy  
and blessed.

2. As real holiness tends to the perfection  
of our being, so it must proportionably add  
to our happiness. We have certain natural  
inclinations after present things, which are  
innocent in themselves; and when they are  
kept within those bounds, which reason  
and religion prescribe, our minds are in an



SERM. easy and quiet state. But if men give way  
XIII. to immoderate anger, when they are provoked; or indulge impure desires, when tempted by forbidden objects; if they inordinately covet what their neighbour possesses, or envy his success and prosperity, their minds are tossed with many unnatural motions, and thrown into violent convulsions. When passion swells too high, it troubles the breast; which cannot be made easy, till that subsides, and is reduced to reason. On the other hand, they, who have mortified all irregular appetites, and govern their inclinations and passions by virtuous principles, are happily freed from these intestine evils; and being of a sweet and benevolent temper, meek and humble in spirit, and moderate in their desires after present things, they cannot but have much peace and satisfaction within. What is said of regular and virtuous desires is also true of good actions. Every man is conscious to himself of what he does, and if his actions are contrary to his inward sentiments, convictions, and known duty, the remembrance of them will be painful and disquieting to his own mind. It is hardly possible to conceive what bitter anguish and regret men feel, when they first venture upon great sins. It is long before they can silence the clamors and remonstrances of their own conscience, and sin with any tolerable ease. And what a wretched state is this, for a man

to be always quarreling with himself, and SERM.  
 justly condemning his own choice and con- XIII.  
 duct; especially if he is in outward distress,  
 or at the point of death, when all his guilt  
 flies in his face, and he is stung with the  
 sharpest remorse? But the virtuous man re-  
 flects on his pious designs, and good actions  
 with satisfaction and complacency; and can  
 derive no small pleasure and support from  
 thence in the greatest troubles of life, and in  
 the agonies of death. Besides, as true godli-  
 ness is most for the peace and comfort of  
 our minds; so it is in all other respects most  
 for our good, *having promise of the life that*  
*now is* annexed to it, as the apostle observes,  
 1 Tim. iv. 8. If there be any ease and  
 pleasure in health, any satisfaction and ad-  
 vantage in a good name, these blessings are  
 procured by a pure, sober, and godly con-  
 versation; but impurity, excess in drinking,  
 and other vices are hurtful to the constitu-  
 tion of the body, and give a wound to the  
 reputation, which is not to be healed with-  
 out a thorough amendment. Industry, tem-  
 perance, frugality, and fair dealing are the  
 most probable ways of thriving in business,  
 and gaining a competent share of present  
 enjoyments; while the contrary vices tend  
 to keep men low, and frequently reduce  
 them to extreme necessities. Our present  
 ease, comfort, pleasure, and happiness there-  
 fore depend upon a good disposition, and  
 virtuous conduct, as naturally tending to our

SERM. good, and deriving upon us the blessing of  
 XIII. the most High. But external observances

have not such an immediate influence upon the peace and quiet of our minds, no natural tendency to promote the happiness of our present condition. They can contribute to our satisfaction and good no farther, than they are useful to make us truly virtuous. Baptism can neither give true peace of conscience, nor procure a good character to a vitious liver. Tho a man ever so frequently partake of the holy communion, yet he will be unhappy, if his vitious habits are unmortified, his actions impure and wicked. For bodily exercise profiteth not, if it be not animated with pious dispositions of heart, and attended with a holy life.

3. REAL holiness is more necessary to our acceptance with God, than the observation of positive rites. He is perfect in knowledge and judgment, and will therefore most approve that, which is most excellent in itself. It must be very wrong to imagine, we can gain his favor by a fervent zeal for that, which is of less value; while we wilfully neglect those things, which are of more worth and dignity. This may be also infered from his benevolence towards us, as well as from his unerring judgment. For he made us not merely for his own glory, but for our own good likewise; and will he not then be better pleased with the practice of moral virtue, which is absolutely  
 necessary



necessary to our true happiness, than with SERM.  
ritual observances, which have not so direct XIII.  
a tendency to advance our chiefest good?   
He is moreover himself most consummately  
holy, and his holiness consists not in any  
thing like external ceremonies; but in the  
perfect rectitude of his will, in mercy, good-  
ness, justice and other moral perfections. For  
this reason he will love his own likeness, and  
take greater pleasure in a temper and con-  
duct agreeable to his own nature and actions,  
than in those outward performances, which  
no way resemble himself. These are cer-  
tain rules whereby to judge, what is most  
necessary to procure his love and approba-  
tion; which is also manifest from the tenor  
of his word and laws, in which the practice  
of mercy, judgment and truth is chiefly re-  
quired. This is so evident from several passa-  
ges cited in my former discourse, and indeed  
from the whole strain of the old and new  
Testament, that I need not prove it by par-  
ticular places at present. Therefore when  
any brief account of true religion is given  
us, it is not reduced to one, or more ritual  
observances; but to some main principle, or  
eminent branch of a holy life. It is fre-  
quently expressed by the fear of God, which  
is the great restraint from sin; or by the  
love of him, which is the purest and most  
active principle of obedience. Our Lord be-  
ing asked, *Which is the great commandment*  
*in the law?* sums up all in the love of God

SERM, and our neighbour, Matt. xxii. 37. In agreement with this St. Paul teaches us, that  
 XIII. *Love is the fulfilling of the law*, Rom. xiii. 10. Add to this, that God has abundantly assured us in the scriptures, that he will not accept of external performances without a pure heart and a righteous conversation. When the Jews neglected mercy and justice in the times of the prophets, and committed great acts of cruelty and oppression, being at the same time very precise in the ceremonial law; as if they supposed it to be the substance of religion, and imagined their exactness therein would be so grateful to God, as to atone for their immoralities: he declared to them, that he had no pleasure in their ceremonial worship, tho' instituted by his own command; and would not accept the richest oblations, which were brought with hands full of iniquity. He even detested their external service, because of their wicked lives, as is plain from Isaiah, and the other prophets. But, no doubt, he would have accepted their sacrifices and offerings, if they had lived righteously, and brought them with pure and righteous hands. Our blessed Lord charges it upon the Jews in his time, as a piece of detestable hypocrisy, that they were rigid observers of the ceremonial part of the law, exact in paying tithe of mint, anise and cummin; but neglected at the same time *the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith*, Matt. xxiii. 23. True religion therefore  
 ever

ever did, and ever will consist in imitating SERM.  
the moral perfections of God, and living XIII.  
righteously, soberly, and godly in this pre-  
sent world. The strictest observation of ri-  
tual appointments cannot recommend us to  
God without purity of heart. It is immo-  
rality, which puts men out of his favor;  
and no acts of external worship can preserve  
them in it, while their manners are corrupt  
and vitious. Indeed impurity and other wil-  
ful sins make the thoughts of God uneasy  
to men, and so unavoidably separate them  
from him. But when they are purified from  
sin, and made truly virtuous, they can me-  
ditate on him with pleasure, and are united  
to him by the similitude of their nature.  
True piety alone reconciles us to God  
through Jesus Christ, and heals that breach,  
which sin had made. All the oblations of  
the law could not procure his favor to the  
unrighteous, but he ever approved of righ-  
teous men. Before the rituals of the law  
were instituted, he accepted Noah, Lot,  
and other holy men; and gave them distin-  
guishing marks of his approbation, by de-  
livering them from those dreadful judg-  
ments, which came upon the wicked. Just  
therefore is the remark of St. Peter, Acts x.  
35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no re-  
specter of persons: but in every nation, he  
that feareth him, and worketh righteousness,  
is accepted with him.* And accordingly St.  
Paul declares, that he would shew mercy  
to



SERM. to a heathen, who lived up to the law written  
 XIII. in his heart ; but would reject a wicked Jew,  
 tho outwardly circumcised, Rom. ii. When  
 the character of those is given us in the Bi-  
 ble, who were the favorites of God ; they  
 are not commended for a scrupulous nice-  
 ness in the ritual part of religion, but for  
 their pious dispositions, and the probity of  
 their manners ; as you may observe in the  
 fifteenth Psalm, and in the accounts we  
 have of Job, Cornelius, and others, who are  
 celebrated for their sanctity, uprightness, li-  
 berality and other virtues. Job i. 1. Acts  
 x. 4. From all these considerations we can-  
 not but perceive, that a christian temper and  
 practice are more necessary to obtain the fa-  
 vor of God, than the observation of positive  
 rites. Baptism will not recommend us to  
 his approbation, unless we live answerably,  
 and walk in newness of life. John the  
 Baptist bid the Pharisees, who came to his  
 baptism, not to pride themselves in their ex-  
 ternal righteousness, and advantages ; nor ex-  
 pect any benefit from the outward ordinance,  
 unless they brought forth fruits meet for re-  
 pentance. The remission of sins is promised  
 to them, who are baptized ; but then it is  
 supposed they have that true repentance,  
 that death to sin, and resurrection to new-  
 ness of life, which is thereby significantly  
 represented. *Know ye not that so many of us  
 as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were bap-  
 tized into his death ? Therefore we are buried  
 with*

with him by baptism into death: that like as SERM.  
*Christ was raised up from the dead by the* XIII.  
*glory of the Father, even so we also should*  
*walk in newness of life, Rom. vi. 3, 4.* Nor  
 will our coming to the Lord's supper please  
 God, and be a means of preserving us in a  
 state of salvation; unless we come with  
 hearts full of love and gratitude to God,  
 with a charitable and forgiving spirit to-  
 wards men, with hearty sorrow for our past  
 imperfections and sins, and with sincere re-  
 solutions of living up to that holy profession  
 of obedience to Christ, which we then most  
 solemnly renew. Holiness is the life of all  
 external duties and ordinances, without  
 which they are lifeless and dead, of no va-  
 lue and worth in the sight of God. We  
 cannot be accepted with him through Jesus  
 Christ in these ordinances, unless we are in-  
 wardly sanctified, and are holy in all man-  
 ner of conversation: which is evident from  
 the words of St. Paul, who says, *There is*  
*therefore now no condemnation to them which*  
*are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the*  
*flesh, but after the spirit, Rom. viii. 1.*

4. THE practice of moral virtue, ac-  
 cording to the principles of Christianity, is  
 more necessary to our eternal happiness, than  
 the observation of positive duties. It is cer-  
 tain, that an universal obedience to all the  
 commandments of God is required of us,  
 and therefore we should not presume wil-  
 fully to neglect any one of them, whatever  
 the

SERM. the nature of it be, whether it be moral or  
 XIII. positive. This would be to govern ourselves  
 ~~~~~ by our own will and caprice, not by his will  
 and authority. But then it must be confessed, that all things commanded are not
 of equal usefulness and necessity. Positive
 duties, such as baptism and the Lord's supper, are only necessary by virtue of the divine command. They do not inwardly dispose us for the enjoyment of God, considered in themselves, without those pious dispositions, we should bring with us, and that holiness of life, which they oblige us to practise. Baptism no way fits us for heaven, and consequently gives us no title to it, if we do not live well, as St. Peter justly observes, 1 Epist. iii. 21. *The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save us, (not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* Christian baptism was not instituted, as those bathings under the law were, to cleanse us from outward impurities of the flesh, but is a sign of the inward purification of our hearts: and therefore the external ablution can no ways avail us in the affair of our salvation, unless we make the responses in baptism sincerely; and have that true repentance, which is therein represented, that newness of life, in which we oblige ourselves to walk. And as to the other sacrament of our holy religion, men may frequently

quently communicate, and yet be never the SERM.
nearer to salvation, if they are uncharitable XIII.
and wicked. Some indeed seem to think, 
that taking the sacrament, when they come
to die, is sufficient to make their peace with
God; tho they have provoked him to that
time, by the most flagitious manners. But
this certainly is a wretched mistake; for no
external performance can give us a title to
heaven, unless we are inwardly prepared for
it, by a christian temper and conversation.
Our Lord therefore pronounces them *blessed*,
who are *pure in heart*, because *they shall see*
God, Matt. v. 8. And this inward sanctity
of the heart is to be manifested by the pu-
rity of our manners. For we are exhorted
to be *holy in all manner of conversation*,
1 Pet. i. 15. Nor is this purity of heart and
life necessary only as a condition required of
us, but also as it is in itself a means to qua-
lify us for a state of perfect and eternal blef-
sedness. Heaven is a state of perfect holi-
ness, to which therefore we must rise by a
course of good actions: which do not only
give us a right to it through the gracious
promise of God in Jesus Christ; but are
likewise a proper and necessary preparation
for it. A sensual life renders men incapable
of relishing the pure and spiritual joys, of
performing the holy and seraphic exercises
above; but when they are cleansed from all
sensuality, and inured to a holy practice,
as they can meditate on God, and converse
with

SERM. with heavenly things with ease and delight ;
 XIII. so they have an aptness to enjoy those pleasures, which are at his right hand for evermore. And being made like to him in holiness, united to him in their affections, and assured of his favor by their sincere obedience to the terms of the gospel, his presence will not strike them with amazement and dread, but fill them with unspeakable comfort, and most ravishing delights. Their worshipping him devoutly here will dispose them to sing his praises with the heavenly choir above. Their benevolence towards all men, and their fervent charity towards one another, will fit them to be members of that society, which is all peace and love. The right government of their natural passions, their humble, sober and chaste conversation will fit them for that state, where no inordinate desires prevail ; but all their affections will be perfectly sanctified, and ever placed upon their proper objects. In a word, having delighted, and lived in the practice of all holiness here, they are prepared for the contemplations and holy exercises of heaven.

FROM these particulars, with those advanced in my former discourse, it seems sufficiently plain, that real holiness is more excellent and necessary than the observation of positive rites. And from hence appears,

I. THE excellency of the christian religion, and the great obligations we are under to its blessed author. It does not abound in religious ceremonies, but only enjoins two positive ordinances, which oblige us to holiness of life, and tend to improve us in that most pure and excellent morality, which it requires. It directs us to lay the greatest stress upon real holiness, and gives us the most perfect rules for the exercise of those virtues, wherein it consists. It teaches us to worship God in spirit and in truth, and to make him the principal object of our love and fear; to put our trust in his name, and always acquiesce in his will, as wise and good. It commands us to exercise the sincerest benevolence towards all men, and to have the most fervent charity for one another. According to our christian principles, we are not to injure any man, but generously to do all the good we can to every one; we must do good even to them, who hate us, as well as to them, who are our friends. We may not indulge the least malice and revenge in our hearts, but must be free to forgive, and easy to be reconciled to all offenders. Christians are to have so great command over their thoughts, appetites, and affections, that they may neither think too highly of themselves, nor immoderately love present things; but be humble and modest, pure and temperate. The christian institution has none of those defects and blemishes,
which

SERM.

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SERM. which stained the morality of, the brightest
 XIII. heathen. It commands us to depart from
 { all iniquity, and to be always ready to every
 good work; which general precepts are more
 distinctly explained, and applied to parti-
 cular cases in other passages of sacred writ.
 It is not contented with the shew of reli-
 gion, but requires the devotion of the mind;
 and obliges us to act from the most pure
 and noble principles, as we desire to obtain
 the acceptance and favor of God, who
 searches the heart. We are to do good from
 love to God, and benevolence towards men;
 and are not to govern ourselves by present
 views, but by faith in that state of perfect
 rectitude and happiness, which is promised
 to us in the gospel. Such an excellent reli-
 gion is not only worthy of God, but like-
 wise most perfective of our nature and hap-
 piness. Our blessed Lord therefore might just-
 ly say, *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light*;
 whether we compare his pure and spiritual
 religion, with the burdensome ceremonies
 of the law, or the wretched slavery of sin.
 Let us therefore always preserve in our
 hearts, and express in our lives a just vene-
 ration for him, and his holy religion; let
 us be thankful to him for all that he has
 done for our salvation, and manifest our gra-
 titude by a sincere conformity to that holy
 institution, he has given us.

2. THE folly of clogging the christian in-
 stitution with a multitude of ceremonies.

The

The number of ritual observances was burdensome under the law, and therefore the apostles thought it the happiness of Christians, that they were not subject to that yoke. Christ has appointed two only, as proper signs of our christian profession, and necessary to preserve in us a just regard to him and his laws. These ought therefore to be religiously observed; but certainly they do much hurt, and spoil the simplicity of his religion, who incumber it with many external rites. In this the Papists have run into as great excess, as the most pharisaical of the Jews; and have dressed up his pure and spiritual religion with so many superstitious fopperies, that if the primitive Christians were to live again, they could hardly know it to be that religion, which they professed. The Papists are not contented with the two sacraments instituted by Christ, but have added five more of their own invention. They have also introduced other external practices, foreign to the power of godliness; as the going on pilgrimages, the worship of reliques, prayers to saints, and many others, in all which they place much of their religion. These things in those, who introduce them, flow from, in others beget, very low and unbecoming thoughts of almighty God; as if he was pleased with them more, than with moral virtue, and would excuse a bad life, where these are punctually observed. But as they are

S E R M.
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SERM. not appointed by Christ our only lawgiver,
 XIII. and are not suitable to the nature and design
 of his religion, they must doubtless greatly
 offend him, instead of obtaining his favor.
 An action, indifferent in itself, can only be
 made religious by the command of God;
 and therefore no such action can ever be re-
 ligious, or acceptable to him, without his
 command. Besides, a zeal for these things,
 which are of human invention, takes up the
 thoughts of men; and too often occasions
 them to neglect those, in which true reli-
 gion consists; or are much better means of
 it, than all unscriptural ceremonies.

3. IN observing the positive precepts of
 the gospel, we should have regard to the
 true ends of their institution. They were
 appointed to be standing signs of our christ-
 ian profession; and therefore useful to pre-
 serve in us a just regard to the truths of the
 gospel, and a constant care to practise that
 holiness, which it requires. In observing
 them consequently, we should always have
 an eye to these important ends. We should
 consider baptism, as a sign of the inward
 purification of our hearts, and a solemn in-
 gagement to live in obedience to Jesus Christ;
 and should therefore make the vows in bap-
 tism with a sincere resolution to keep them;
 and afterwards endeavour to bring forth fruits
 meet for that repentance, which we then
 profess. We should come to the Lord's sup-
 per, and solemnly commemorate the death of
 Jesus

Jesus Christ from a grateful sense of the love of God to us in sending him to suffer death for our sins; and with a view to keep alive in our hearts that humble sense of our sins, that love to God, that remembrance of our baptismal vows, which will restrain us from sin, and excite us to holy living. And if this be our view in coming to this holy ordinance, we shall, every time we communicate, make some proficiency in the christian life. We cannot frequently communicate, if we do it in a serious manner, but it will confirm our pious resolutions, by fixing upon our minds a greater sense of the obligations we are under to live well; and will increase and heighten our love and gratitude to God, by devout meditations on his inconceivable love to us in Jesus Christ. And therefore by attending this sacred ordinance, as often as we have opportunity, we shall be more and more purified from sin; and by degrees attain that confirmed state of holiness, which will give us assured hopes of acceptance with God here, and prepare us for the pure and blissful regions above.

4. WE should not speak slightly of real holiness, nor of those good works, wherein it consists. Tho we should always retain a humble sense of our own manifold imperfections, and not vainly imagine, that our best services merit eternal life; yet we should not think too meanly of those actions, which are sincerely done in obedience

S E R M. to the precepts of Jesus Christ. Good works
XIII. are indeed with some Christians very mean things, not considering that nothing else is intended by these words, than the christian practice. In their prayers, sermons, and discourse they affect to speak of good works in the very same words, which the ancient prophets use in speaking against the ceremonial righteousness of the Jews, when hypocritically performed; and call those actions filthy rags, which the sacred writers compare to white robes, and esteem the brightest ornaments of rational minds. And can we wonder that christian piety decays, when good works are so misrepresented, and spoken of with so much slightness? May it not be feared, that such discourses have had an unhappy influence upon the state of religion amongst us; and have made real holiness neglected by some, Christianity itself rejected by others? These persons may mean well, but surely they do not consider, that one great end of all, which Christ has done and suffered for us, even of that sacrifice he offered for us on the cross, was to deliver us from the power of sin, and to make us holy: which has been already sufficiently explained from divers scriptures in another discourse. And is it indeed fit to speak meanly of those acts of obedience, which make us like to God, and without which we cannot be meet for the kingdom of glory? Do any pious men named in the Bible,

Bible, and justly renowned for their emi-
nent faith, and righteousness, do Job, He-
zekiah, or St. Paul speak of their sincere

SERM.
XIII.

obedience in such low, diminutive terms?
Do Christ and his apostles in any of their
discourses speak in the same manner, as some
now do, of good works, in order to magni-
fy the merit of that sacrifice, he offered for
our sins upon the cross? They are so far
from doing this, that they always inculcate
the necessity of repentance, and a holy life,
in order to our obtaining pardon, and accep-
tance with God through his mediation.
Let us not therefore think meanly of good
works, lest our notions should bias our prac-
tice, and tempt us to neglect them; but let
us set a just value upon them, that we may
become more fruitful in them, and abound
in all acts of sincere obedience to our blessed
Lord. May we always place our religion
chiefly in that real holiness, wherein it chief-
ly consists. May we always have the life
and power, as well as the profession and
form of godliness. The best use we can
make of these discourses is to be careful that
we do not rest in the outward form of reli-
gion, but govern our temper and actions by
the moral precepts of Christ. Men of all
persuasions are too apt to take up with the
external part of religion, because it is more
easy to perform that, than it is to mortify
their sinful passions, and govern themselves
by the pure laws of Christianity. Too

374 *Real holiness more excellent, &c.*

SERM. many among the Papists think well of
 XIII. themselves, because they strictly observe the
 traditions of their church; tho they most
 uncharitably censure, and most barbarously
 use those, who dissent from her communion.
 Too many Protestants likewise place their
 religion in a constant course of external
 worship, and ardent zeal for the tenets of
 their own party; but are not sufficiently
 careful to regulate their lives by the moral
 precepts of the gospel. But let us not de-
 ceive ourselves. The best and purest form
 of religion will be of no service to us with-
 out a holy conversation. May we all of
 us therefore adorn our holy profession by a
 suitable life, and by patient continuance in
 well doing, secure to ourselves a glorious im-
 mortality through Jesus Christ our Lord and
 Saviour.



S E R M O N



S E R M O N XIV.

Of sins of omission with respect to
moral duties.

MATT. XXV. 41, 42, 43.

Then shall he say to them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.



THE laws of God either prohibit those evil things, which we should not commit, as intemperance, uncleanness, revenge, lying, with other vices; or injoin those things we should practise, as prayer, almsgiving, forgiveness of injuries, with
other

SERM. other duties. A transgression of the former
 XIV. laws is called a sin of commission, because
 we do what is forbidden; but a breach of the
 latter is termed a sin of omission, because we
 omit what we should have performed. Sins
 of commission generally strike the consci-
 ences of men with greater horror, than sins
 of omission. They, who dare not venture
 upon wicked actions, can make themselves
 very easy in the neglect of a known duty.
 How many, who would not do an unjust
 and cruel thing to their neighbour, will ne-
 vertheless refuse to succour him in his distress?
 And when men decline from a good life,
 they commonly begin first to omit some
 duty, or means of religion, as secret pray-
 er, and the public worship of God; by
 which they are gradually prepared for greater
 offences, and at length fall into the most
 enormous crimes. But if they would seri-
 ously consider the awful and strict account,
 which they must give to the supreme Judge
 hereafter, they would see, that they may be
 condemned for the neglect of means, and
 the omission of known duties. Our blessed
 Lord, that we may not think too lightly of
 sins of omission, shews us in this view of
 the future judgment, that we must be called
 to account for the good we have omitted, as
 well as for the evil we have done. He does
 not here tell us, that he will condemn those,
 who have falsely slandered the righteous, and
 inflicted evil upon them without just cause,
 who

who have cruelly oppressed and persecuted SERM.
his servants; but that he will even pass sen- XIV.
tence against such, as saw them in distress, 
and had ability to relieve them; but would
neither give them food to satisfy their hung-
er, nor clothe them, when naked, nor visit
them in sickness and in prison. And if he
will punish them, who neglect works of
mercy; no doubt he will punish others for
acts of injustice and cruelty, as we are suffi-
ciently informed in other places: but that
we may not falsely imagine, we are in a safe
condition, because we do no great harm,
tho we are far from doing so much good as
we are able to do; he plainly acquaints us
in this account of the general and last assize,
that many will then be cast for the wilful
omission of known duties. And he instan-
ces in uncharitableness, because as sincere
love is the spring of all the duties we owe to
our brethren and neighbours; so this is the
cause, from which all neglect of those du-
ties proceeds. What is here said of this par-
ticular sin may, and ought to be applied to
other sins of omission. When the apostle
gives us a catalogue of several sins of com-
mission, which will certainly exclude men
out of heaven, Gal. v. 19, 20; he intimates
in the next words, that other like sins, be-
sides those particularly named, will have the
same unhappy effect: *Envyings, murders,*
drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the
which I tell you before, as I have also told you
in

SERM. in time past, that they which do such things,

XIV. shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Thus,

from what our Lord here says of the omission of mercy, we may and ought to conclude, that the wilful neglect of other duties may exclude men from heaven. We ought to obey the other affirmative laws of God, as well as the law of charity. And because men generally think too lightly of sins of this kind, we are told in other places, and in more general terms, that they will not only deprive us of happiness, but may also expose us to misery in the life to come. John the Baptist assures the Jews, that, *Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire*, Matt. iii. 10. In the parable of the talents, our blessed Lord himself shews us, that the unprofitable servant, who had not made a good improvement of the means he enjoyed, and the abilities he possessed, will be cast into outer darkness, Matt. xxv. 30. Thus likewise in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, he does not say, that he will shut the gates of heaven upon liars, drunkards, adulterers, and other such sinners: but upon the foolish virgins also, who had no oil in their vessels, that is, upon those professors of religion, who are without those good works, which they ought to have done. From these and other places, as well as from my text, it evidently appears, that sins of omission may exclude men from heaven; and that the neglect

neglect of charity will expose them to this SERM.
inconceivable loss. In discoursing therefore XIV.
from these words, I shall not confine myself 
to the sin of uncharitableness only; but shall
explain the general doctrine, which may be
inferred from them, That men will be ex-
cluded from heaven for the omission of mo-
ral duties. As to the omission of the posi-
tive duties of religion, that does not come
under my present consideration. The sub-
ject before us is of the greatest consequence,
and deserves our most serious attention. We
should be exceedingly careful, that we leave
nothing undone, which is necessary to our
eternal salvation; and should obey all the
commandments of God, that we may have
a well grounded and undoubted assurance of
eternal life. That I may proceed clearly in
this matter, it will be necessary,

I. To shew you, what omissions of the
moral duties of religion will be imputed
to us as sinful.

II. To set forth the great guilt of them,
and to assign the reasons, why they will
be punished with the loss of heaven; that
the equity of our great Judge may appear,
and we may be excited to the observation
of all his commands.

III. To

SERM.
XIV.

III. To inquire into the principal causes of these sins of omission, that we may be careful to avoid them.

IV. To fix our thoughts on those things, which may effectually ingage us to the practice of all holiness.

I. I AM to shew, what omissions of the moral duties of religion will be imputed to us as sinful.

I CANNOT run over all the sins of this kind, which are as numerous as the laws of God, which injoin the practice of particular virtues. They may be reduced to three general heads, under which all the particulars are comprehended. Some men are deficient in those duties, we owe to our blessed Creator, as they certainly are, who live in the neglect of prayer. Others come short in their obedience to those laws, which prescribe our duty to our neighbours and relations; which is the fault of them, who are not charitable and just, who are not dutiful to their parents, nor faithful to their masters. A third sort may neglect those virtues, which concern themselves, as temperance, chastity, and the like. Every one should consider what duties are contained under these general heads, and he may then easily know, whether he omits any of them, which he ought to perform. If he is not too much a
2 stranger

stranger to himself, his conscience will plainly tell him of his faults. But what duties he omits, must be left to his own inquiry.  It is my business to shew you, when the omission of moral duties will be imputed to us as sinful. And,

I. IF men know what they should do, and yet choose to leave it undone, this omission will be imputed to them. *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*, James iv. 17. Their guilt is not much, if any thing less, who are wilfully ignorant; and understand not what they ought to do, because they resolve not to consider. Many seem to be ignorant of the obligation, which they are under to make restitution for the injuries they have done to their neighbours; but they must, no doubt, be inexcusable: for is it not as easy to know, that they ought to make restitution, as it is, that they should not do any wrong? If men are ignorant of their duty through former neglects, or prejudices, which they have taken up; this may in some measure mitigate, but cannot wholly excuse, the omission of their duty. We may, I think, apply to this case what St. Paul says of himself. Before he believed, he was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. *But I obtained mercy*, says he, *because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief*, 1 Tim. i. 13. It was a sin, because he might have known better; but yet as he was ignorant, it did in some

SERM. some degree diminish the greatness of his
 XIV. crime. So may the ignorance of men lessen, tho it cannot wholly excuse, their sins of omission, if it be owing to former neglects. But when a man is involuntarily ignorant, or knows not his duty, because he had not the means of knowing it; or tho he used his best indeavours, yet remained ignorant in some respect; his ignorance will be a sufficient excuse for not performing that duty. It is therefore that omission of a duty, which men knew, or might have known, if they had not been culpably ignorant, which will be charged to their account as a wilful sin.

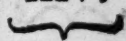
2. THE laws of God bind them only, who are capable of performing what is enjoined; for he requires of no man more, than he is able to do. He cannot give alms, who is in want and distress himself; and therefore his omission of charity will not be reckoned to him in that instance, in which he could not possibly exercise it. But then a man may contract an incapacity of giving alms through his own fault; and this will by no means excuse him, because it is wilful. This is the case of those, who are not able to give to the poor, because they waste their substance by an affectation of grandeur and other sinful excesses, which render them incapable of doing good. In order to acquire a habit of temperance, meekness, and other virtues, there are certain means and
 indeavours

indeavours to be used ; and he cannot possibly practise these virtues, who has wilfully neglected these means. But this incapacity will not excuse the omission of these duties, because he might have been able to do them, if he had carefully attended to the proper and necessary means. It is therefore the voluntary omission of those duties, which a man knew, or might have known ; which he could do, or might have done, if he had not been wanting to himself, which will condemn him at the great day.

3. THERE is a difference between the negative and affirmative laws of God, which relate to moral duties ; what the former prohibit is never to be done, but what the latter injoin, is to be observed at certain times. We must never be drunk, nor commit murder, nor do other things, which are forbidden, because they are evil at one time, as well as at another. But as for those things, which are commanded, as prayer, and almsgiving, these are to be exercised in their proper seasons. We must indeed always have a prevailing disposition to them in our hearts ; but we are not obliged to be always actually employed in doing them. We are not to be ever on our knees praying to God, nor ever dealing our bounty to the poor ; but to pray daily at proper times, and to relieve the necessitous, as we have opportunity. It is therefore the omission of a duty at that time, in which it should have been performed,

SERM. formed, which is evil in the sight of God,
 XIV. and will condemn us at last, if we do not
 repent in time.

4. AGAIN it is necessary to be observed, that a person may fall into the omission of a known duty through surprise, forgetfulness, and inadvertency, but presently recover himself, and return to the practice of it again. He may forget to pray, when some very urgent business lies upon his thoughts, and calls him away, tho he be otherwise a devout man, and does not choose to omit his prayers to God. He may perhaps in some particular instances not give alms, where he should have done it, tho he be generally a very kind and charitable man. He may in other respects come short of what he ought to have done, tho he do not allow himself in the omission of a known duty. In all these things, there is a degree of sin, because we are commanded to be watchful, that we may not forget our duty; and ought to be always so well disposed, as to do good upon every occasion, which presents itself. But then, as such slips are what the best of men cannot always avoid in this imperfect state, they will be graciously overlooked in those, who are grieved for them, and persevere in their duty with greater resolution and care. But if a man always, or for the most part, chooses to omit a known duty, as prayer, or almsgiving; this will be imputed to him as a wilful sin. The chosen, habitual

bitual omission of a duty therefore, which S E R M. we are able, and ought to perform, is what XIV. will condemn us, if we do not amend in time. 

5. T H E Y, who live very wickedly, must omit several duties, especially those, which are contrary to their peculiar vices. They cannot possibly exercise temperance, who are addicted to hard drinking; nor can they practise chastity, who give themselves up to impurity. Such was the case of the Pharisees, who did not only omit the weightier matters of the law; but lived also in covetousness, ambition, extortion, excess, hypocrisy, and other enormous crimes. Others there are, who do not appear to be very wicked men, but yet they are not zealous of good works. They dare not venture upon scandalous crimes; but they can be easy in the neglect of several of those duties, which they owe to God and their neighbour. They abhor the impiety of such as take the name of God in vain; but either constantly, or for the most part, neglect prayer and the confession of sin, tho it is made one condition of our pardon. Prov. xxviii.

13. *He that covereth his sins, shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.* Many would by no means injure and oppress their neighbour, nay are very honest and punctual in their dealings; but yet have no bowels of compassion to the poor and distressed, and can refuse to

SERM. relieve them; as if they were under no
 XIV. obligation to do good, provided they did
 no wrong. But that the omission of known

duties in those, who run not into great wickedness, may condemn them hereafter, is most evident from the state of the persons spoken of in the text; whom our blessed Lord does not charge with oppression, and other great sins of commission, but with neglecting those offices of love, which their distressed brethren wanted, and they were able to perform. St. Paul therefore justly determines, *But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse then an infidel*, 1 Tim. v. 8. From all these remarks we may plainly perceive, that those failings and omissions, which are not chosen, will not condemn; but be graciously forgiven to those, who do not wilfully neglect a known duty. The capacities, infirmities and advantages of men are vastly different; and God, no doubt, will judge them according to their state, and make all reasonable allowances for any disadvantages they might labor under. But it is also evident from what has been said, that he will condemn men for the wilful omission of known duties, in which they persist, and do not repent in time. I come,

II. To set forth the great guilt of these sins of omission, and to assign the reasons why

why they will be punished with the loss of SERM.
heaven; that the equity of our great Judge XIV.
may appear, and we may be excited to the
observation of all his commands. And,

I. SUCH wilful, and continued omissions of the moral duties of religion are as direct violations of the law of God, as sins of commission. For as in general we are commanded to depart from iniquity, so likewise are we required to do good. There are not only laws which forbid anger, revenge, covetousness and pride, with other vices; but also such as command the practice of every virtue, as the fear and love of God, justice and charity towards men, temperance and chastity, with the several branches of them. I need not here give you a detail of these laws, since you cannot but observe them in reading your Bible. The law of God therefore does not only forbid injury, cruelty, and oppression, but also enjoins justice, mercy, and charity; and he, who wilfully omits the latter, is a transgressor of the law, as well as he, who commits the former. Sins of commission may argue a greater degree of wickedness, and contract greater guilt in many cases; but yet a wilful, and continued omission of a known duty contrary to the will of God, and the frequent rebukes of our own consciences, must be very criminal, and sometimes perhaps exceed the guilt of the former. A man may

SERM. do an evil action through the surprise of a

XIV. violent temptation, which will in some measure extenuate his fault; but he, who lives in the omission of a known duty for many years, must act deliberately, which will mightily inflame the guilt of his sin. However, the authority of the supreme lawgiver is slighted, and set at nought by them, who wilfully omit their duty. Had such persons a due regard to his will, they would observe what he commands, as well as abstain from those things, which he forbids. These neglects of duty, being wilful breaches of the divine law, must incur the penalty, which is threatened to the transgressors thereof. The transgression of the law is sin, whether it consists in doing, or neglecting something contrary to the command; and, *The wages of sin is death*, as St. Paul observes, Rom. vi. 23. The same sanction and punishment are annexed to the negative, and affirmative precepts of our holy religion. If it is said in general that, *The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God*, 1 Cor. vi. 9; is it not likewise declared, that *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*? Heb. xii. 14. And as the abstinence from particular sins of commission is made a condition of our salvation by Jesus Christ, and everlasting destruction is threatened to those, who do them; so the practice of particular virtues is required on the same terms, and the neglect of them threatened with exclusion

clusion from heaven. If one text says, *SERM. Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge, XIV. Heb. xiii. 4; another says, He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy, James ii. 13.* I cannot stay now to mention other particular places, and shall therefore only remind you of St. James's words, ch. ii. 10. *Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all:* he as wilfully breaks the law, and is as liable to the penalty annexed to the breach of it, as he, who transgresses it in more instances. He, who neglects charity, breaks the law, as well as he, who commits murder; and therefore cannot claim the reward promised to them, who keep the law, but must suffer the punishment denounced against wilful offenders. Not that all sins are equal; but yet every man, who wilfully violates the law, must suffer the penalty in proportion to his guilt, whether his transgressions are more or fewer, and attended with less or greater aggravations.

2. THESE wilful transgressions of the affirmative laws of God are utterly inconsistent with sincerity and true principles of religion. For if men truly believed in God, and had regard to another world, they would be more conscientious, and would not presume to omit any one thing, which is made a condition of their eternal salvation. If they sincerely loved their Maker, they would delight in keeping his commandments; and

SERM. could not be easy, while they offended him
 XIV. by neglecting any one thing, which he requires. If his fear prevailed in them, they would not dare to allow themselves in the omission of any thing, which bears his authority, and is necessary to please him. Where true principles are implanted in the heart, they will shoot out into all virtuous habits, and bring forth all the fruits of righteousness. This is evident from what our blessed Lord will say to the uncharitable, who would not succour his distressed servants, according to their ability. *Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me,* Matt. xxv. 45. He supposes they would have been kind to his servants, if they had really loved him as much as they professed to do. These persons might be none of the worst livers, they might perhaps pray to God, and perform other duties of religion; but in these things they were not influenced by sincere love to Jesus Christ, which he proves, to their utter confusion, from their want of compassion and charity to his poor, suffering, and persecuted servants. They therefore, who wilfully leave undone, what the law of God requires, are not sincere; because their obedience is defective, and what they do, proceeds not from true principles of religion. I do not say, but a sincere Christian may fail sometimes, through ignorance, surprise, forgetfulness, or want of
 care;

care ; but that a chosen and continual omission of a known duty is not to be reconciled with sincerity. For this reason our blessed Lord accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy, who were precise and scrupulous in the observation of ceremonial rites ; but at the same time lived in the neglect of mercy, and the love of God. He instances in these virtues, because they are the genuine principles, and the sum of all those duties, which we owe to God and our neighbour ; which intimates to us, that those persons are destitute of these active and noble principles, who wilfully neglect any of the particular duties, which are comprehended under them. The character of a sincere and upright man is this, that he observes all the commandments of God, from a right purpose of heart. He therefore, who injures and oppresses his neighbour, is unworthy of this character, because he voluntarily breaks the divine law. And is not this manifestly his case also, who is uncharitable ; since he does not keep all the laws of God, nor is actuated by true principles of obedience ? When persons can wilfully neglect, what they know to be their duty, it is not the love of God, but something else, which restrains them from open wickedness, and inclines them to do some good things. Their natural shame, and desire to maintain a fair reputation among their neighbours, may restrain them from open vices ; and it may be nothing

SERM.
XIV.

SERM. thing but fashion, formality and interest,
 XIV. which leads them to profess religion, and
 attend the public worship of God. And
 can it be thought, that he will accept a
 partial obedience, which flows not from
 right principles; but from those perhaps,
 which are bad, or at best have nothing to
 do with religion?

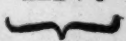
3. THESE wilful omissions are complicated with other sins, which must inflame their guilt in proportion to the obliquity of them. Men are indeed generally denominated from that sin, which most notoriously prevails over them; or from the omission of some particular virtue, in which they constantly allow themselves. We call them drunkards, who make a custom of drinking to excess; and those uncharitable, who will not relieve the poor; but these sins must necessarily be attended with others; for it appears from what has been said, that such persons cannot love and fear God, which are particular virtues of the christian life, as well as principles of that sincere obedience, which the gospel requires. All acts of obedience are but so many instances of love to God, and therefore, where any of them are wilfully neglected, that love must be wanting. This morality is not more severe, than that which the holy writers teach, but indeed the very same. For St. John tells us, *whoso bath this worlds good, and seeth his brother*

ther bath need, and shutteth up his bowels of SERM.
compassion from him, 1 John iii. 17. But the XIV.
omission of one duty does not only procede 
from the neglect of others, but even takes its
rise many times from some vitious disposition,
or evil practice. Men often neglect some par-
ticular duty, because it interferes with the
gratification of an indulged appetite or vi-
tious custom, which they will not mortify
and reform. Why are many rich persons un-
charitable to the poor and distressed, but be-
cause they are covetous, and place their af-
fections more on things below than on things
above? Is not this same exorbitant passion
for money the cause, why others cannot re-
solve to make restitution for the wrongs they
have done to their neighbours? Besides, as
these omissions owe their birth to some sins,
so they generally bring forth others. There
is such a connexion between the virtues of
the christian life, that the neglect of one
paves the way for the neglect of others, and
tends to harden the conscience, and drive re-
ligious principles out of the heart. And
when a man has neglected a known duty
for a long time, and the fear of God, with
other religious principles, are by this means
weakened and defaced, is it any wonder
that he falls into other sins, when a tempta-
tion lies in his way? If men do not devoutly
and constantly pray to God, they will cease to
fear and love him, to hope and trust in him,
as they ought to do. And when they cease
to

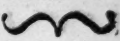
SERM. to do good, they will begin to do evil.

XIV. From hence we may perceive, that the breach of charity, and the other affirmative laws of God, for which men will be condemned, is not the only article of their accusation. Their great sin involves them in many others, which increase their guilt. Their remissness in prayer, and other duties of religion, makes them fall into other sins; or those sins, with which they are intangled, are the cause of their leaving off their prayers. And from all this it appears,

4. THAT the wilful and constant omission of known duties will shut men out of heaven, because they are not prepared and fit for the enjoyment of it. They are thereby made incapable of true happiness, and what they suffer is the unavoidable consequence of their own neglect. True happiness does not consist merely in having no irregular appetites, which give us pain; or in not doing those evil actions, which fill us with uneasy reflexions. To be without these is no more than to be free from misery, which surely is not all the happiness we are capable of attaining. It must be the enjoyment of good things, which can make us truly blessed. It must be regular desires, holy passions, and virtuous habits, which give us inward peace and tranquillity, and enable us to enjoy our being with pleasure in all circumstances of life. It must be a course of pious, righteous, and generous actions, which

which can fill us with complacency, and SERM.
yield us agreeable and delightful after- XIV.
thoughts. It is not our having no hatred 
to good men, and doing them no injuries,
which can fit us to dwell with them in hea-
ven; but our loving them sincerely, and
likeness to them in holiness are necessary to
prepare us for their society, and give us plea-
sure in conversing with them. Nor is it our
having no hatred to God, but our loving
him, and resembling his perfections, which
can prepare us to behold his face without
dread, and to delight in his presence. In
order to enjoy him here, to think of him
with comfort, to be assured of his favor,
and to receive his blessings, we must be like
him, who is not only pure from all moral
evil, but is likewise most perfectly holy.
*God, says St. John, is light, and in him is no
darkness at all. If we say that we have fel-
lowship with him, and walk in darkness, we
lie, and do not the truth.* He therefore con-
cludes, that in order to enjoy the favor of
God, we must imitate his perfections. *But
if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship one with another, and the
blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from
all sin, 1 John i. 5, 6, 7.* And if we can-
not here have any part in his favor, any
pleasure in thinking of him, unless we are
holy, as he is holy; it is certain, that in-
ward purity of heart, and a course of good
actions, must be necessary to fit us for his
presence

SERM. presence in heaven. Heaven is the consum-
 XIV. mation of that holiness we here begin to
 practise; the perfection of those solid pleasures springing from thence, we now enjoy in proportion to our advancement in virtue. We cannot therefore be in ourselves rightly disposed for this most blessed state, unless we are inured to those good actions, which give us real pleasure here; as well as freed from the power of those vitious customs, which torment and rack our minds with pain and regret. And if the sincere practice of holiness gives us a fitness for the most pure and refined joys above, what can be plainer, than that the want of this qualification may exclude us from that glorious and blessed place? And what reason dictates to us in this case, is abundantly confirmed by divine revelation. Positive holiness, you know, is made the condition of our salvation by Jesus Christ. We are not only commanded to be negatively holy, or to abstain from wicked actions; but are also to be positively holy, zealous, active, and stedfast in all good works. We, who have the sure expectation of a glorious resurrection from the grave to an immortal happy life, are not only obliged to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*; but also to *perfect holiness in the fear of God*. We are not to be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not; we must be *stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work*

work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know SERM.
that our labour is not in vain in the Lord, XIV.
2 Cor. vii. 1. Gal. vi. 9. 1 Cor. xv. 58. 

No less plain is it from a multitude of other places, which time will not permit me to recite, that we can have no claim to the heavenly bliss from the gracious promises of the gospel, if our minds are not adorned with virtuous habits.

AND these now are the reasons, why our great and impartial Judge will shut some persons out of his eternal kingdom for the voluntary omission of known duties. They as directly break the law of God, as others, who do wicked things; and tho for some reasons they may abstain from open vices, yet they have not due regard to the authority of God, and are not influenced by love to him. Their wilful neglects of duty procede from, or involve them in, other sins; and by their natural consequences render them incapable of the happiness above. And can we then wonder, that he will pass sentence against them in the general judgment, as he assures us in the text? Let us therefore seriously inquire into our state, and if we are conscious to ourselves, that we have knowingly omitted any of our christian duties, let us repent of our past neglect, and resolve to practise them for the future. Let us not make vain excuses for ourselves, but set about the performance of them without delay; and that we may keep ourselves

SERM. ourselves from such sins, let us avoid all
XIV. those things, which are the causes of them,
and impress upon our thoughts a serious
sense of those considerations, which may
engage us to the sincere practice of all
christian virtues. These things come next
under our consideration, but there not be-
ing time to enter upon them at present, I
shall leave them to the next opportunity.



SERMON



S E R M O N XV.

Of sins of omission with respect to
moral duties.

MATT. XXV. 41, 42, 43.

*Then shall he say also to them on the
left hand, Depart from me, ye
cursed, into everlasting fire, pre-
pared for the devil and his angels.
For I was an hungred, and ye gave
me no meat: I was thirsty, and
ye gave me no drink: I was a
stranger, and ye took me not in:
naked, and ye clothed me not:
sick, and in prison, and ye vi-
sited me not.*

AS the terms of salvation by Jesus S E R M.
Christ are not a mere belief in XV.
his doctrine, and profession of his
name; but a prevailing temper
conformable to the spirit of the gospel, and
a course of action directed by his laws: so
the necessity of preserving such a temper and
practice,

SERM. practice, in obedience to his will, cannot, I
 XV. think, be more plainly demonstrated, than
 from these words; in which our great Judge
 assures us, that he will pass sentence against
 many at the last day for the wilful omission
 of known duties. That I might therefore
 excite every one to a diligent observation of
 the terms of salvation, I proposed to shew,
 from this text, the danger of sins of omis-
 sion, with respect to the practice of moral
 virtue, as taught and enjoined by the christ-
 ian institution. And this important subject
 I have endeavour'd to discourse of in such a
 manner, as might neither raise groundless scru-
 ples in your breasts, nor give any encourage-
 ment to a supine neglect of known duties.
 Our gracious God knows the weakness of
 our understanding, and the narrowness of our
 capacities; and considers the many frailties and
 temptations, which attend us in this world.
 He sees how liable we are to mistake, even
 when we take the best care to inform our-
 selves; and that through a strict attention
 to one part of our duty, we may unwarily
 slide into some remissness in others. He ex-
 pects from no man more, than he is enabled
 to do; and will graciously accept of us, if
 we sincerely use our best endeavours to un-
 derstand, and obey his will. He will make
 all due allowances for those prejudices of
 education, which we could not get over by
 an honest inquiry after truth. He will not
 condemn us for those slips and failings, which
 come

come from surprise, weariness, or such like SERM.
causes; and are neither chosen, nor continu- XV.
ed, in opposition to the convictions of our
own hearts. But let none of us presume to
live in the wilful neglect of duties, which
we know, and are able to perform; for
such a voluntary omission is inconsistent
with a state of salvation, and if we do not
repent of it in time, will certainly exclude
us from heaven, as incontestably appears
from my text, and many other places of
holy writ. That such sins of omission will
have this sad effect, was proved from several
arguments in my former discourse. And
first, it was shewn, that tho men are apt to
think lightly of them, they are as direct
violations of the law of God, as sins of
commission. Again, they who live in these
sins, act not from the fear and love of God,
nor from other true principles of religion,
which would dispose them to perform those
duties, which they omit; for which reason
our blessed Lord tells such persons, that they
would have succoured his afflicted servants,
if they had truly loved him. Besides, the
voluntary omission of one duty either springs
from, or draws after it, many other sins of
omission and commission; so that it is not
the only, tho it may be the chief, article
of their condemnation. And lastly, it is
not merely the pleasure of almighty God,
but their own incapacity for heaven, which
will exclude them from thence. Barely to

SERM. abstain from sin cannot fit us for the blessed
 XV. mansions above. It must be the possession
 of virtuous habits, and the remembrance of
 good actions, which can give us true pleasure and satisfaction here, and really dispose and qualify us for a state of perfect rectitude and felicity hereafter. It is not our having no hatred to God and good men, but being like them in all holiness, and loving them sincerely, which can give us delight, and make us happy, in the enjoyment of their presence.

FROM all these reasons it appears, that the sentence, which our blessed Lord will pronounce against such persons at the great day, will be most equitable and just. Let me therefore intreat you, as you regard your own peace and happiness, to consider with yourselves, whether you do not live in the breach of any known commandment of God, that you may not fall short of that holiness, which is necessary to your salvation. You will be greatly mistaken, if you think this to be an inconsiderable matter, which is indeed of the highest concernment. For men destroy themselves by the practice of some favorite vices; or by the omission of some particular duties, which renders their obedience so maimed and insincere, that they are not capable of that salvation, which the gospel promises, and which consists in a state of perfect rectitude and perfect felicity.

Since

Since this affair therefore is of so great consequence, let us procede,

SERM.
XV.
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III. To inquire what are the causes of these sins, that we may carefully avoid them. And,

I. ONE cause of these sins is some indulged lust or vitious practice, in which persons delight. They, who live in one sinful custom, must unavoidably neglect the contrary virtue; as he, who lives in drunkenness, cannot possibly exercise temperance. But what I would now observe, is, that one prevailing habit of vice may introduce the neglect of other duties, which are not so immediately opposed to it. The practice of drinking to excess may cause a man to live in the neglect of prayer, tho he believes it to be his duty; because it indisposes him for it, and, like other vitious habits, makes the thoughts of God unpleasant to his mind. We must therefore avoid such sins, that we may constantly perform those duties, which they occasion us to omit. They are bad in themselves, but very much aggravated by the consequences of them; because for the pleasure of gratifying them we neglect what we should do. We ought therefore to forsake them, not only for their own malignity, but for their bad effects, as they obstruct the practice of those duties, we are obliged to perform. As the author of the epistle to the Hebrews directs us, *Let us lay aside*

SERM. every weight, and the sin which doth so easily
 XV. beset us, and let us run with patience the race
 that is set before us, Heb. xii. 1; or, which
 is all one, readily and constantly practise all
 the duties of the christian life.

2. SOME men wilfully neglect what they should do, because they are not actuated by true principles of religion. The wilful omission of what we know to be our duty is not consistent with sincerity, as I proved to you in a former discourse. They cannot love God, nor their neighbour, nor indeed themselves, who are not godly, righteous, and sober; or who knowingly omit any of the duties comprehended under these general terms. They, who sincerely love God, will delight in praying to him, and will not only perform the other duties they owe to him, but will take pleasure likewise in observing all his commandments. *If a man love me, says Christ, he will keep my words, John xiv. 23.* His love for Christ will not suffer him to be idle, and stand still, in the very beginning of a holy life; but will push him on with vigor, and make him fruitful in all good works. A hearty goodwill and affection to our neighbour will dispose us to fulfil every duty, to which we are obliged by the relation there is between us; for love, as the apostle says, *is the fulfilling of the law.* A due concern for our own salvation will make us strictly careful to leave nothing undone, which is necessary on our
 part

part to obtain it. We must therefore profess ourselves with all those principles, which will not only restrain us from doing evil, but will also make us active in doing good. We must meditate on the perfections and goodness of God, and the many obligations we are under to love all men; on the greatness of that salvation, which is proposed to us in the gospel, and the miserable condition of those, who are deprived of it; that our hearts may be warmed by such a sincere love to God and men, and filled with such a mighty concern for our own eternal state, as will constantly move us to obey the whole will of God.

SERM.
XV.

3. ANOTHER cause of these sins of omission is the neglect of those means, without which the habitual practice of virtue cannot be obtained. No man can become holy on a sudden, whose inclinations have been bent to vitious courses for many years. He must endeavour to understand, and resolve to practise his duty, before he can begin to do good; he must pray to God and add serious endeavours to his prayers, that he may succeed in shaking of his evil customs, and be steadfast in the practice of the contrary virtues. Besides these general means, which are necessary to acquire any good habits, there are others peculiar to the nature of that virtue, which is to be acquired. In order to break off a custom of excessive drinking and to become sober, a man must shun such com-

SERM. pany, in which he used to commit this sin.

XV. Humility must be acquired by serious reflexions on our meanness, imperfections and sins, and by considering the vast disproportion there is between us and almighty God. In other cases those methods are to be taken, which are proper and necessary to procure the habit of those particular virtues, in which we are defective. The reason, why men are not pious and devout, meek and charitable, temperate and chaste, is because they have not used those means, by which they might have obtained the habit of these virtues through the blessing of God. We should therefore diligently use proper means, because we cannot otherwise attain the practice of virtue, nor be excusable, if we do not use them.

4. Too many indulge themselves in the wilful omission of some duties, because they live in the external practice of others, contenting themselves with a partial obedience. This delusion seems to have taken very much with the Jews in the time of our blessed Saviour, which made them very solicitously inquire, which was the great commandment of the law, that by observing it, they might recommend themselves to the favor of God; as if they hoped the observation of that alone would compensate for all their sins, and make up all their defects. But the answer our blessed Lord gave to the lawyer, who asked him which was the great commandment, evidently shews the folly of this

this presumption. He pronounced the love of God to be the first and great commandment, and the love of our neighbour to be next to this; because all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments: for he, who loves God and his neighbour sincerely, will not wilfully neglect any of those duties, which he owes to them. Upon another occasion he reproves the Pharisees for making void the commandments of God by their traditions; because they taught, that a man was excused from assisting his parents, if he had vowed to devote to a religious use, what might have enabled him to support them. But he was previously obliged to help and assist his parents, and therefore such a vow was null, and ought not to be kept. There is not therefore any one thing, tho ever so excellent in itself, which will make amends for the neglect of other known commandments of God. It is an universal obedience to his laws, which he requires, as the condition of his favor. And yet too many Christians, it is to be feared, deceive themselves, as the Jews did, by relying on a partial observance of his will. Are there not some, who hope well of their state, because they are sober and honest; tho they have not a benevolent heart, and do not give alms according to their ability? But if they live soberly and honestly in obedience to the will of God, why do they not likewise give alms; since this also is what

SERM. he commands? As charity is much recom-

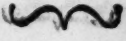
XV.  mended by the christian institution, many build their hopes on some great acts of this virtue; and when they have spent all their lives in uncharitableness, nay, have lived in oppression and other sins, bestow great bounties on the poor at last; as if they hoped to make atonement for all their crimes, and to bribe their great Judge by legacies to the poor. But what ground have they for these vain expectations? God expects we should do good in obedience to him, and not to excuse our wilful faults; and has granted no indulgences to them, who are liberal to the poor; much less to such as have no heart to do good, till death is coming to strip them of their possessions. We should not therefore build too much on the practice of any eminent virtue, in which the greater care ought to be taken; because not only this vain presumption of commuting for the neglect of other duties, which is utterly inconsistent with sincerity, but the laying too much stress on one thing may make us come short in other respects. Such is the imperfection of our minds, that when we are very intent upon one thing, we are apt to forget others no less necessary to be done. How often does the zeal of men for some opinions, which they believe to be true, not only destroy their charity, but even trample upon the laws of equity and justice? Many, who spend much time in retirement and devotion,

votion, are neither so humble in their own opinion, nor so charitable in their judgment of others, as they ought to be. But others make themselves easy in sins of omission, not because they practise some eminent virtues, but because they are not altogether so bad as their neighbours. When they see others committing gross iniquities, a secret pride and satisfaction arises in their breasts; and they think themselves good enough, because others are abundantly worse. Our blessed Lord has very justly exposed this delusion in his parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Luke xviii. 11. *The Pharisee, says he, stood, and prayed thus with himself; God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers: or even as this Publican.* But he forgot, poor man, his spiritual pride, and his making void the commandments of God by human traditions. We should not compare ourselves with other men, but with the word of God; and observe, not how much evil we avoid, but how much good we neglect. At least we should not compare ourselves with the wicked, but with the righteous; and then we shall clearly perceive our own imperfections, which will not flatter our vain pride, but excite us to greater diligence in the performance of our duty. In a word, whatever makes us neglect any one virtue of the christian life, must be avoided; for that certainly is evil, which is the cause of our
living

SERM. living in a wilful sin. But so much may
 XV. suffice for the causes of sins of omission. I
 { procede,

IV. To represent to you those considerations, which should excite us to the practice of all holiness. And,

I. LET us consider, that we cannot answer the ends of our creation and redemption, without actual holiness. We are certainly capable of doing good, as well as of ceasing from evil. We may not only keep ourselves from acting impiously towards God, and injuriously towards our neighbour; but we may adore, and love, and praise him, and do several good offices to other men, according to our places and abilities. The infinite perfections of God, and his manifold goodness towards us call for the former; and the latter we are obliged to perform, by the relation there is between us and our fellow creatures. And why are we indowed with a capacity to perform those duties, which arise from our dependence on God, and our relation to men? Should we content ourselves with doing no evil, and neglect all our abilities to do good, without any use and improvement of them? Can such an indolent and fruitless life answer the end of God, who has placed us in our present stations, and made us capable of acting in a suitable manner? No, it must certainly be his will, that we should not only be inoffensive

five and harmless; but should make a right SERM.
use of all our faculties, and imploy all our XV.
powers in doing good; in acts of piety to-
wards him, and beneficence towards men. 
The whole creation will upbraid our negligence, if we omit those duties, which belong to our places. No other beings around us are useless and unactive, but answer the various ends, for which they were created. For if we consider the angelical orders, which are of superior rank, they are not only indowed with greater activity, and larger powers; but they continually imploy them in executing the will of the Creator, and delight in ministering to the meanest of those, who are heirs of salvation. And if we look down upon those animals, which are below us in the scale of being, do we not observe them always exerting their natural faculties, and pursuing the ends of their make without any intermission? Even the inanimate part of the creation will reproach our indolence, and may shew us what is expected from us, who are indowed with understanding. The sun continually runs his course, communicating heat, and diffusing light to all those orbs, which revolve about him in their stated periods. He sends forth his rays to cheer us by his warmth, and to direct us by his light. The earth exerts that prolific quality, with which it is indowed; and annually produces a variety of things, which do not only most agreeably

SERM. bly entertain our senses; but afford wholly
 XV. some nourishment to our bodies, and furnish us with many accommodations in life. And shall we alone be unactive, and not exert ourselves in answering the end of our being, who are blessed with such large and excellent capacities, and understand the obligations we are under to our bountiful Creator? We are indeed doubly obliged to be active and industrious in performing all those duties, which belong to our state; because he has not only wonderfully made us, but has also most graciously redeemed us by his Son Jesus Christ. He sent him to recover us from that miserable state, to which sin had reduced us; and by him has given us more perfect rules for the practice of virtue, and more certain hopes of a future state of rewards, that we may not only more easily understand, but also be more able to practise all the virtues of the christian life. And did our blessed Saviour come to suffer for us, and give us better means and assistances, that we should abstain from doing evil only? Will this answer his end, or be a suitable return for all his kindness, or a due use and improvement of all the precepts and helps, which he has afforded us? Is it not fit, that we, who are favored with greater advantages, should also be more eminently holy? This most certainly was his view, for he gave himself for us, that he might not only redeem us from all iniquity, but purify unto himself a peculiar

liar people zealous of good works, Tit. ii. 14. SERM.
This design of Christ is plainly declared in XV.
other places, and he therefore is far from
answering the end of his blessed Redeemer,
who allows himself in sins of omission.

2. LET us next consider the character
of those holy men, who are recorded with
honor in the scriptures, as approved of God
in their time. Is it only said of them, that
they did not live in grosser sins, and were
inoffensive in their conduct? This would
be a very low commendation indeed, and
is far beneath the description, which is there
given of them. We cannot but observe,
that positive holiness always enters into their
character. They did not only preserve them-
selves from the reigning vices of the times,
but were likewise eminent for their stedfast
faith, and for their useful, exemplary lives.
It is said, that *Noah was a just man and
perfect in his generations: and Noah walked
with God,* Gen. vi. 19. He did not run
into the same excess of wickedness with
others, but devoutly worshiped God, and
persevered in a steady course of righteous-
ness. Of Job it is written, that he *was per-
fect and upright, and one that feared God,
and eschewed evil,* Job. i. 1. He did not
only keep himself from wilful sin, but was
a sincere worshiper of God; and tho he
was not without infirmities, yet he was an
excellent example of charity, patience, and
other virtues. In the height of his prospe-
rity

SERM. rity and grandeur, he did not despise, much
 XV. less oppress the poor, nor neglect any opportunities of doing good; but generously employed his substance in acts of bounty, and made use of his power to protect the innocent, and deliver the oppressed, as he no less elegantly than truly describes his conduct. *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me. Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widows heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not, I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth,* Job. xxix. 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17. David did not hope for acceptance with God, unless he payed an universal obedience to his commands. *Then, says he, shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments,* Psalm cxix. 6. We read of the parents of John the Baptist, that they were both righteous before God, and walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless, Luke i. 6. All these characters shew, what God expects from us, and what manner of persons we must be, if we would approve ourselves to him, and obtain his favor through Jesus Christ. We must with
 them

them not only mortify our sinful passions, SERM.
and truly repent of all unrighteous actions; XV.
but also become pure and sober, devoutly
call upon God, and exercise charity and
justice towards men. If we are conscious
to ourselves, that we are unlike them, de-
stitute of those virtues, which they so emi-
nently practised; what well grounded hope
can we have of living for ever with them,
and injoying their agreeable society in hea-
ven? We must follow them in those paths
of holiness, in which they walked, if we
would attain the same inward tranquillity
here, and safely arrive at those mansions of
perfect purity and happiness, to which they
are gone.

3. WE cannot act up to our christian
profession, if we live in the voluntary omis-
sion of moral duties. No institution of re-
ligion is so pure and perfect as that, which
we have received from Jesus Christ. He
does not only forbid all inordinate desires,
and sinful actions; but has likewise given us
the plainest and most perfect rules for the
practice of virtue. He promises greater aids
to enable us to live well, and sets before us
the most powerful motives to obedience.
By what he has suffered for us, he has laid
us under the most indearing obligations to
follow his example, and to be zealous of
good works. When we are baptized in his
name therefore, we solemnly renounce all
sin, and vow to live according to his institu-
tion;

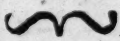
SERM. tion; and this profession we renew, as often
 XV. as we come to the holy communion. We

cannot therefore adorn, but shall disgrace our high vocation, if we go no farther than to abstain from evil. To abstain from evil is but the beginning of a virtuous life, and is too low an attainment for Christians, who profess so excellent and perfect an institution. Even Jews and Gentiles have gone far beyond this, and it will be a shame to Christians, if they do not excel them in virtue, in proportion to the greater knowledge and advantages they enjoy. If they would do honor to their holy profession, and manifest to others the excellency of the christian precepts and motives, they must not only be inoffensive, but conspicuously useful and holy. The Christian must not only believe in God, and be far from entertaining any irreverent thoughts of him; but must be possessed with such a vigorous sense of all his perfections, as to love him with all his heart, and to worship him with the most pure and unaffected devotion; to be ever thankful to him, and to desire nothing so much as to please him. He must not be unconcerned at the afflictions of others, but heartily sympathize with them; and be so far from neglecting them in their distress, that he must prevent their application by his free and generous bounties. He must not only behold the prosperity of others without envy, but rejoice in it; nor think well of himself,

himself, if he does no injury, unless he also SERM.
delight in doing good, as he has opportunity. In every state of life, he must act XV.
below the character of a Christian, if he
does not sincerely perform those duties,
which belong to it. The poor Christian
must not only resist those temptations to
evil, which attend his mean condition; but
must be an example of integrity, content-
ment, and resignation to the divine will.
The rich should not think, that he fulfils his
duty by not oppressing the poor, nor abu-
sing his riches in luxury; but must do good,
be rich in good works, ready to distribute,
and willing to communicate, as St. Paul di-
rects, 1 Tim. vi. 18. It will be a mean
thing in a Christian barely not to behave ill
in those relations, he stands in to others;
and to maintain the credit of his profession,
he must distinguish himself by a behaviour
kind and good in all respects, according to
those rules, which are given us by the sa-
cred writers for the conduct of parents and
children, of husbands and wives, of masters
and servants towards each other. Christians
therefore should not only be dead to sin, but
live unto righteousness; and be so renewed
in their minds, that they may abound in all
the fruits of the spirit. They should not con-
tent themselves with a partial obedience, but
extend their practice to the whole compass
of their duty. They ought not to be like
barren ground, which, tho it is not overrun

SERM. with noxious weeds, yet produces no good fruit; but having their minds enriched with pure and vigorous principles must bring forth, and be *filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.* They should come up to the exhortation of Christ, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven,* Matt. v. 16. Their virtue should not be low and obscure, but such as will make itself observed without ostentation; and set the christian institution in so fair and advantageous a light, that others may be induced to receive it, and render glory to God. If they would adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour, which Christians of the lowest rank are obliged to do; they should be eminent for their piety, examples of benevolence and justice, and remarkable for meekness, humility, and all good works. *Herein is my Father glorified,* says Christ to his disciples, *that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples,* John xv. 8.

4. THE nature of that happiness, which we expect to enjoy in the world to come, should make us careful not to indulge ourselves in the deliberate and wilful omission of known duties. For do we only hope to be made negatively happy, or barely delivered from those pains, which afflict our bodies, and those troubles, which disturb
our

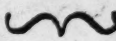
our minds in this state ; to be secured from SERM.
the malice and injuries of evil men, and XV.
placed above all the disappointments and 
miseries of this life, without injoying any
real pleasure and positive felicity? Our ex-
pectations are not so low, and we ought not
indeed to entertain such mean conceptions of
the future state of good men. Heaven is not
only described to us in scripture, as a place
free from all evils, but as replenished like-
wise with all true felicity. There believers
will be perfectly happy in their minds and
bodies, in their circumstances and society.
Their bodies will be refined from all that
grossness, which makes them subject to wea-
riness, pain, and death ; and will be so
changed as to become ever active, glorious,
and immortal. Their minds likewise will be
purified from all those imperfections, which
attend them in this state ; so that the under-
standing will always perceive, and the will
constantly choose what is right and good.
Being thus made perfect in themselves, and
all outward impediments removed, they will
make such advances in knowledge, as are
inconceivable to us at present. Their facul-
ties being enlarged, they will have a more
quick perception, and clear discernment of
those things, which they could not here
find out by all their pains and study. They
will then be perfect in holiness, as well as in
knowledge, and will therefore have no guilt
to disquiet their minds, no fear of losing

SERM. the divine favor; but will enjoy perpetual
 XV. tranquillity within, and rejoice for ever in
 the presence of God. They will for ever
 live in the most agreeable society, and gradually attain all that perfection, of which they are capable. And will all this happiness, all this real, and consummate, and everlasting happiness be conferred on them, who, tho they have not defiled themselves with gross immoralities, yet have not attained to the habitual practice of divine, social, and private virtues? The happiness of heaven will in a great measure result from that perfection in holiness, which the righteous will there attain; and how then can they be prepared for it, or reasonably hope to obtain it, who are destitute of virtuous habits, and are therefore conscious to themselves, that they have no inward fitness for that blessed state? And does not this consideration, together with the inconceivable greatness of the future blessedness, shew us the necessity of improving our minds with all virtuous habits, and exercising ourselves in every good work? Can we think it sufficient only to abstain from those sins, which would fill us with shame and trouble, that we may obtain so great felicity? Will not a state of perfect and neverending happiness more than reward all the pains we must take to acquire the habits of virtue, by performing those duties, which we may be inclined, or tempted to omit? We know that
 those

those virtuous actions, which will dispose us S E R M.
for the enjoynments and exercises above, will XV.
likewise yield us increasing pleasure and hap-
piness here, in proportion to the progress we
make in real holiness. Having therefore
these promises, that we shall not only be
delivered from all the imperfections and evils
of this life ; but be made perfectly and ever-
lastingly happy in the future state, if we are
truly righteous here ; let us never grow re-
miss in the performance of any christian
duties, but the longer we live, let us be
making greater advances in all holiness.
And every man that hath this hope in him,
says St. John, *purifieth himself, even as he is*
pure, 1 Epist. iii. 3. This is that prepara-
tion we should make for a blessed eternity,
and without which, good hopes of it, through
Jesus Christ, are not to be obtained.

IF we will then attentively reflect on the
ends of our creation and redemption, and
the character of those pious men, whom
God has approved in former times ; on the
nature of the christian institution, and of that
happiness it promises to sincere believers :
we must acknowledge the danger of indul-
ging ourselves in the chosen and voluntary
neglect of any moral precept of our blessed
Lord ; and see the necessity of being always
influenced by such principles, as will pro-
duce an unreserved and persevering obedi-
ence to all his commands. I have insisted
so much on this matter, because too many

SERM. persons seem not to have a due sense of
 XV. sins of omission. If they have not wilfully
 ~~~~~ wronged any man, nor committed any other  
 great crime, they hope God will be merciful  
 to them. And these things are commendable indeed ; but certainly Christians should  
 go much farther, and be so far from living  
 in the omission of any known duties, that  
 they should be fervent in prayer to God,  
 active in doing good to men, examples of  
 selfgovernment in all respects. To the up-  
 right practice of these things salvation is  
 promised in the gospel, and we shall sadly  
 impose upon ourselves, if we hope to attain  
 it without them. Has not our blessed Lord  
 himself compared one, who heareth his say-  
 ings, and doth them not, to a foolish man,  
 who built his house upon the sand ; where  
 it had no sure foundation, but fell, when the  
 floods came, and the winds blew, and beat  
 upon it ? Matt. vii. 26, 27. And that we  
 may be constantly virtuous, and do good  
 according to our several abilities, let us never  
 forget the awful process of the last great  
 day, as it is described in the text ; and from  
 which it is plain, that the wilful omission of  
 our duty may disqualify us for heaven, and  
 involve us in everlasting destruction. For  
 these persons, who will then have sentence  
 given against them, are not charged with  
 acts of violence and oppression ; and they  
 seem to have been secure enough of heaven  
 in their own expectation, because they were  
 not

not guilty of such great transgressions. But, SERM.  
you see, they will be mistaken, and so far XV.  
from being admitted into that blessed place,   
that they will be sentenced to everlasting punishment, because they had not cultivated and practised benevolence and other christian virtues; nor improved those opportunities of doing good, which were put into their hands. Let us not therefore neglect the practice of any christian virtue, for whatever art we may have to deceive, and make ourselves easy at present, what shall we think of it when we come to die, and appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ? Shall we not be ashamed and speechless, if we are then found not having on *a wedding garment*, that is, without those white robes of true holiness, which become our christian profession, and without which we shall not be prepared to meet the Lord at his coming? Let us always remember, that we must not be unprofitable servants; but well improve our several talents, and be good stewards of the manifold grace of God, that we may enter into the joy of our blessed Lord. Let us frequently read and consider those places of the new Testament, which shew us what the habitual temper and practice of a Christian should be, that we may not be so defective in either, as to be rendered unworthy and incapable of the heavenly glory. And, to use the words of St. Paul, *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever*  
E e 4 things

SERM. things are honest, whatsoever things are just,

XV. *whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* Let us, I say, think of these things, not only as excellent in themselves, but as necessary to prepare us for that state of perfect purity and happiness, which we hope to obtain through Jesus Christ our blessed Lord and Saviour.



SERMON





## S E R M O N XVI.

Mutual love the distinguishing mark  
of true Christians.

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JOHN xiii. 35.

*By this shall all men know that ye  
are my disciples, if ye have love  
one to another.*



**T**HAT love, which our blessed S E R M.  
Lord here enjoins, is so agreea- XVI.  
ble to the inward sentiments  
of human nature, and gives so  
much pleasure to them who  
practise it; has so great a tendency to pre-  
vent many evils, and to conciliate the favor  
of others; is so plainly taught us by his ex-  
ample, and so strongly inforced by various  
motives in his gospel; that we might think  
there could be no necessity to persuade Christ-  
ians to love one another: but yet the passions  
and resentments of men are so strong, their  
opinions and interests so jarring, that no-  
thing needs to be more frequently inculcated.

Our

SERM. Our blessed Lord therefore recommends this  
 XVI. virtue to his disciples with the greatest earnestness, and proposes his own example for their rule in the practice of it. *A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*, ver. 34. In which words he cannot be supposed to call it a new commandment, as if mutual love was not a duty, which they were obliged to practise previously to his command. They were bound to love one another by that natural relation, which was between them as men, antecedently to any written law of God; and by the law of Moses, they were obliged to love their neighbour as themselves, Lev. xix. 19. But yet his commandment may be justly called new, because he does not command them to love one another, as they loved themselves, which was the precept of the law; but to love one another, even as he loved them. Such a perfect rule of charity was never given to mankind before. By fulfilling this commandment of loving one another, as he has loved us, we must shew, that we are his disciples. There are indeed other ways, by which we may declare ourselves to be his disciples. We profess this by being baptized in his name, and by coming to the sacrament of the Lord's supper; but then persons may profess to be his disciples, when they are not really such. He therefore uses the word emphatically,  
 and

and means, that their loving one another in S E R M.  
this manner will prove, that they are his XVI.  
true disciples. In another place he is repre-  
sented, as saying to them, *Ye are my friends,*  
that is, my sincere friends, *if ye do whatso-*  
*ever I command you,* John xv. 14. Thus  
other words are frequently used in the holy  
scriptures. Knowledge is put for true know-  
ledge, 1 John ii. 3. *And hereby we do know*  
*that we know him, if we keep his command-*  
*ments;* and love for sincere love, ch. v. 3.  
*For this is the love of God, that we keep his*  
*commandments: and his commandments are*  
*not grievous.* If therefore we would be as-  
sured, that we are true disciples of Jesus  
Christ, we must endeavour to express, in our  
temper and lives, that love to one another,  
which he manifested towards us. In dis-  
cussing from these words, I propose to  
shew,

- I. How Christians should love one another  
in imitation of Jesus Christ.
- II. THAT their loving one another in this  
manner will shew, that they are truly his  
disciples.
- III. How we may judge of ourselves by  
our love to one another, so as not to be  
deceived. I am to shew,

I. How



SERM.  
XVI.

I. How Christians should love one another in imitation of Jesus Christ. And,

I. THEIR love should be real and undissembled. He did not only profess great kindness towards us, but manifested the reality of his love by the most beneficent actions. Our love towards our brethren therefore must consist in such a hearty benevolence, as will effectually move us to do them good, according to their condition, and our capacity. Both the inward principle of benevolence, and the outward action corresponding to it, must be united in true and undissembled love. The external part will not be acceptable to God, if it procede not from an inward affection; and it is in vain to pretend a kind disposition, where a suitable behaviour is wanting. Where both these concur, there is that love without dissimulation, to which St. Paul exhorts the Christians at Rome, Rom. xii. 9. Christians should therefore have such a sincere good will towards one another, as will constanly exert itself in all the offices of mutual love. They are not to have a selfish regard to their own humor and interest; for St. Paul says, *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*, Phil. ii. 4; and *by love serve one another*, Gal. v. 13. They should do good to one another in their temporal affairs. With them,  
who

who meet with any afflictions, they should heartily sympathize; or in the words of St. Paul, they must *weep with them that weep*, Rom. xii. 15. Nor should they only commiserate their case, but also administer to them proper comfort and relief. James ii. 15. *If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food; and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace; be you warmed, and filled: notwithstanding ye give them not those things, which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?* And if they should so readily assist their brethren in their temporal state, how much more should they be concerned for their eternal happiness, and endeavour to promote it by all possible means; by seasonable exhortations and reproofs, by a holy and edifying example, by earnest prayers and intercessions?

2. THEIR love should be pure and disinterested, like that of Jesus Christ. His beneficent actions towards us were not designed to promote any self interest of his own, but to do us the greatest good; to deliver us from the worst of evils, and to make us eternally happy in the future state. Christians therefore in all their actions, which are in themselves charitable, should be influenced by pure benevolence, not acting from any mean view to their own advantage, but from a generous regard to the welfare of their brethren. They should do good to them, who cannot recompense their good offices,

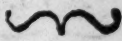
SERM. offices, as well as to those, who are able to

XVI. return their kindness. They should not only do good to such as have obliged them, but to those also, who have given them offence.

*For if ye love them, says Christ, which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same, Luke vi. 32, 33.*

3. THEIR love should shew itself by their forbearance and candor. Our blessed Lord meekly bore with the infirmities of his disciples, and did not cease to love them because of their failings. He was offended with them indeed, and rebuked them upon several occasions; for their intemperate zeal against the Samaritans, and their ambitious contention, which of them should be the greatest in his kingdom; for their want of faith, notwithstanding all the mighty works they had seen him do: but yet he continued his friendship to them, and kindly rectified their mistakes; and put the most favorable construction upon their actions, which they could possibly bear. When they slept so unseasonably in the time of his prayers and agonies in the garden, he said to them; *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak, Matt. xxvi. 41*; at the same time judging candidly of their sincerity, and giving a reason for their greater care and watchfulness. Christians therefore should not rashly judge their brethren, but should always incline



cline to the most favorable side; and judge SERM.  
charitably of their words and actions, till there XVI.  
is manifest reason to the contrary. Charity,   
says St. Paul, *believeth all things, hopeth all things*, 1 Cor. xiii. 7. When others behave ill towards them in their words or actions, they should not be easily provoked, nor fly out into undue resentments; but should be meek, and exercise forbearance: For charity *is not easily provoked, but beareth all things*, ver. 5, 7. Not but that they may, and ought to reprove those, who have acted unkindly towards them, or done them wrong; but then it should be managed in such a meek and prudent manner, as will not stir up strife, and breed lasting animosities, but keep their affections, as well as make them sensible of their fault. Luke xvii. 3. *If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.* When any one therefore has given them offence, they should not take up implacable resentments, but be easily reconciled. *And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christs sake hath forgiven you*, Ephes. iv. 32.

4. OUR blessed Lord manifested his love to us by many acts of the greatest selfdenial. Tho he was the onlybegotten Son of God, and heir of all things; yet he divested himself of his glory, and lived in a mean and poor condition, that he might enrich us with spiritual blessings, and procure for us

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SERM. an eternal inheritance in heaven. *Ye know,*  
 XVI. says St. Paul to the Corinthians, *the grace of*  
 our Lord Jesus Christ, *that though he was*  
*rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that*  
*ye through his poverty might be rich,* 2 Epist.  
 viii. 9. He condescended to bear the greatest  
 indignities, that we might be exalted to the  
 highest honor; and humbled himself so low  
 as to be crucified like a slave, that we might  
 be made heirs of eternal life. *Let this mind*  
*therefore be in you, which was also in Christ*  
*Jesus,* as St. Paul exhorts the Philippians,  
 ch. ii; where he so justly describes the self-  
 abasement and humiliation of our blessed  
 Lord. We must not only do good to others,  
 when it will cost us nothing; but must take  
 pains, and forego our own ease, pleasure,  
 and advantage sometimes, that we may be  
 serviceable to others in their temporal affairs.  
 The rich should not only retrench all luxu-  
 rious and extravagant expences, but should  
 also deny themselves some innocent gratifi-  
 cations rather than not lay up a private stock  
 for works of mercy. Much more should  
 we be willing to forbear what may destroy  
 the peace of our brother's conscience, and  
 obstruct his eternal salvation. St. Paul there-  
 fore justly blames some persons as acting  
 most uncharitably, who would not deny  
 themselves the liberty they had of eating  
 certain meats, from which they might ab-  
 stain without injury to their own consci-  
 ences; but used their liberty, tho, by their

example, others were imboldened to eat SERM.  
 with a doubting mind, which must conse- XVI.  
 quently involve them in sin, and give them ~  
 trouble afterwards, or perhaps occasion  
 their everlasting perdition. Rom. xiv. 15.  
*But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat,*  
*now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not*  
*him with thy meat for whom Christ died.*  
 Christians should be so far from acting in  
 this manner, that they should live in the  
 exercise of mutual love, tho they exposed  
 their own lives. That our blessed Lord expects  
 this high degree of mutual friendship from  
 his followers, is plain from the words added  
 to the precept in the preceding verse, when  
 repeated by him again, John xv. 12, 13. *This*  
*is my commandment, That ye love one another,*  
*as I have loved you. Greater love hath no*  
*man than this, that a man lay down his life*  
*for his friends.* And this explication of his  
 words is confirmed by St. John, that great  
 example, and earnest recommender of true  
 charity, 1 Epist. iii. 16. *Hereby perceive we*  
*the love of God; because he laid down his life*  
*for us: and we ought to lay down our lives*  
*for the brethren.* And the apostles indeed  
 were shining examples of this excellent vir-  
 tue. They bravely exposed their lives in  
 preaching the gospel, that they might pro-  
 mote the salvation of believers, by confirm-  
 ing them in their holy faith and practice;  
 and might recover sinners from their evil  
 courses to the ways of truth, righteousness,



SERM. and salvation. No doubt St. Paul was moved by a sincere affection to the souls of  
 XVI. men, as well as by an ardent zeal for Christ, when he so nobly declared: *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God,* Acts xx. 24. But other Christians were obliged to imitate the love of Jesus Christ, esteeming nothing so dear to them, as the salvation of their brethren. They were bound to live in communion with them, and perform all the offices of sincere love towards them, tho they exposed their own lives, by discovering themselves to be Christians, and laying themselves open to the malice of persecutors. So real and undissembled, so pure and disinterested, so candid and forgiving, so constant and self-denying should be the love of Christians towards one another, if they would imitate that love, which Christ manifested to them. And this brings me to shew,

II. THAT their loving one another in this manner will prove, that they are truly his disciples. For,

I. SUCH a mutual love, as this, is agreeable to the nature and design of his religion, and a good evidence, that they sincerely believe in him. The christian institution breathes nothing but love and good  
 I will

will to all mankind. When the angels proclaimed the birth of Christ, this was their song; *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men,* Luke ii.

14. It is therefore called the *gospel of the grace of God*, Acts xx. 24, because it more plainly discovers the mercy of God to a sinful world. Moreover, the christian dispensation is sometimes expressed by the word, *grace*, in the sacred writers, because it gives a brighter display, and more certain assurances of the favor of God. He was indeed always propitious in himself, and willing to embrace returning sinners; but by the death of Jesus Christ he has favored us with a higher instance of his love, and given us more lively hopes of forgiveness. God, says the apostle, *commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*, Rom. v. 8. And it is plain, I presume, from the tenor of the new Testament, that he did not take this method, only as a wise and just lawgiver, that he might secure the honor of his laws; but as a merciful and compassionate father also, that he might deliver us from those discouraging fears, which arise from the sense of guilt, and win us to repentance by the most endearing assurances of mercy. And when the whole world lay in wickedness, and had almost extinguished the light of reason by their vitious customs, it was the greatest goodness in God to send his Son

S E R M. Jesus Christ to recover them from their ignorance and sins; to bless them with the knowledge of the truth, and to reconcile them to himself. The holy writers represent this grace of God in very strong expressions, calling it *the glory of his grace*, and *the exceeding riches of his grace*; and seem indeed to labor for words, which may give us some idea of the unspeakable mercy of God. His grace is variously manifested to us in this method of our redemption; in making the knowledge of his will more plain and easy by the doctrines of Christ; in giving us more comfortable hopes of pardon by his death, and raising him from the dead, that we might have a more assured expectation of a blessed resurrection; in his assumption to heaven, which gives us the clearest views of a better world. He makes us in the gospel more excellent promises, than were contained in the law, not only proposing to us the protection of his providence, but also the internal aids of his spirit; not only offering us temporal blessings in this life, but eternal joys also in that which is to come, as the rewards of our faithful service. And as the whole scheme of the gospel more abundantly displays the grace of God, so it is exceedingly fitted to inspire the minds of men with good will towards one another. His kindness to us in Jesus Christ lays an obligation upon us to do good according to our abilities, and teaches



us the most perfect practice of love. For SERM.  
 this reason St. Paul tells the Thessalonians, XVI.  
*But as touching brotherly love, ye need not*  
*that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are*  
*taught of God to love one another,* 1 Theff.  
 iv. 9. And St. John observes, 1 Epist. iv.  
 11. that, *If God so loved us, [as to send his*  
*Son to be the propitiation for our sins] we ought*  
*also to love one another.* One great view of  
 Christianity is to extirpate all unfriendly ha-  
 bits, and to plant the most generous prin-  
 ciples in their room; to recover men from all  
 the evil customs of this world, and to in-  
 corporate them into religious societies, that  
 they may be more eminently useful to one  
 another. This being the nature and design  
 of the christian religion, what can be more  
 suitable to it than mutual love in all them,  
 who profess it? what can more plainly evi-  
 dence, that they sincerely believe, and are  
 influenced by the gospel of Christ? On the  
 other hand, nothing is more directly oppo-  
 site to this mild and gracious dispensation,  
 than unkindness and cruelty, than immode-  
 rate anger and implacable resentments. Who  
 can think, that an uncharitable man sincerely  
 believes in Jesus Christ, when there is so  
 wide a difference between his temper and  
 his religion? St. John says, *He that loveth*  
*not, knoweth not God; for God is love,* 1 Epist.  
 iv. 8: and, *If a man say, I love God, and*  
*hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that*  
*loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how*

SERM. *can he love God, whom he hath not seen?* ver.

XVI. 20. But when persons are ready to do  
 good, and to forgive injuries, this shews  
 that they have the spirit of Christ in them,  
 and are truly his disciples. Therefore St.  
 John says, *Beloved, let us love one another:*  
*—and every one that loveth, is born of God,*  
*and knoweth God,* ver. 7. So that the mutual  
 love of Christians will manifest, that they  
 are the children of God indeed, and there-  
 fore sincere believers in the gospel of Jesus  
 Christ.

2. IT will be an evidence, that they are  
 truly his disciples, as it shews they have a  
 due regard to his will and authority. What-  
 ever men may profess by their words, they  
 are not real Christians, unless they live ac-  
 cording to the laws of Jesus Christ. For as  
 it is the design and tendency of his religion,  
 to inspire men with a benevolent and ge-  
 nerous temper; so there is nothing, which  
 he more earnestly presses upon us in several  
 precepts of his gospel. Other good things  
 he would have us do, but on this he lays  
 peculiar stress; and recommends it to us in  
 his last discourses, as that by which he would  
 have us distinguish ourselves from the rest of  
 the world. *By this shall all men know that*  
*ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to an-*  
*other.* The disciples of others distinguished  
 themselves by various methods. Those of  
 the Pharisees were known by the formalities  
 of their dress, and those of John the Baptist  
 by

by the austerity of their lives. One sect of SERM.  
the philosophers was distinguished from an- XVI.  
other, by some favorite maxim, or even by  
the place, or manner, in which their ma-  
sters read their lectures. But Christ expects  
that they, who believe in him, should ma-  
nifest their relation to him by love, the most  
useful virtue. And this was a very proper  
mark of distinction for them, who believed  
in the gospel of peace, when the world was  
full of strife and contention, and the gene-  
rality of men served *divers lusts and plea-*  
*sures, living in malice and envy, hateful and*  
*bating one another,* Tit. iii. 3. Our blessed  
Lord therefore frequently inculcated the prac-  
tice of love, which appears from many other  
places, as well as from the text; and parti-  
cularly from John xv. 12. *This is my com-*  
*mandment, That ye love one another, as I have*  
*loved you.* He calls it his commandment by  
way of eminency. Tho there is no virtue,  
but what he requires us to practise; yet that  
which he chiefly expects from us is to love  
one another, because this will make us the  
most useful, not only inclining us to wish  
well, but likewise moving us to do good to  
all. And as love in general is commanded  
in these and other precepts of Christ; so  
there is no temper, no action, contrary to  
it, which he forbids not, as all rash judging,  
evil speaking, and persecution; no particular  
instance of love, but what he requires, as  
charitable judging, kind speech, acts of boun-



SERM. ty, and the forgiveness of injuries. In the  
 XVI. view he gives us of the future judgment,  
 how plainly, how movingly, does he represent the necessity of shewing our love by real acts of kindness, as we desire to be approved by him at the great day? To those precepts, which Christ delivered to his disciples with his own mouth, we must add them, which he has given us by the apostles. And what is there so frequently inculcated, so earnestly pressed upon us in all their writings, as mutual love? We are therein required to love one another sincerely, *Let love be without dissimulation*, Rom. xii. 9; and to be constant in the exercise of it, *Let brotherly love continue*, Heb. xiii. 1. This they recommend to us as the great duty of Christians; *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins*, 1 Pet. iv. 8: as that which is the sum of all other duties, because it will most effectually restrain us from doing any thing injurious to our brethren, and excite us to treat them well in all respects, as St. Paul observes, Rom. xiii. 10. We are exhorted to shew our love by our works, *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth*, 1 John iii. 18: and rather to hazard our lives, than to neglect any office of love, which we owe to our christian brethren, as appears from the words of St. John already quoted. From all this

it

it appears, that he alone is the true disciple of Christ, who lives in the sincere and constant practice of this virtue. He does not only profess himself to be, but is really his disciple; because his temper is conformable to the will of Christ, and his conduct towards all men is governed by his laws. The more perfectly he practises this virtue, the more worthy is he of that blessed name, by which he is called. But how does it appear, that he is a disciple of Christ, who allows himself in those things, which are contrary to brotherly love? He may indeed profess the true doctrine of Jesus Christ, and be nominally his disciple, but he cannot really deserve this honorable name. For while he lives in the neglect of charity, and does those things which are inconsistent with it; he slights the authority of Christ, and tramples upon his laws. His prevailing temper, and general practice being so very opposite to this virtue, shew him not to be a sincere disciple of Christ, as much as if he denied his authority; which he does in fact, tho not in words. And here it must be observed, that he cannot be defective in this excellent virtue, but he must be likewise wanting in other parts of his christian duty. For love is the great principle of all social virtues, and he, who is not influenced by it, will live in the neglect of them, and perhaps give into the contrary vices. Whence procede all censoriousness and evilspeaking, all unkind and unjust

SERM. unjust actions, but from the want of love?

XVI. If men were animated and guided by this benign principle, they would not do the least injury to their brethren, but would be tender of their ease, reputation, and welfare. He therefore, who is moved and governed by this virtue, will also perform every other duty. He will be just and upright in all his dealings, and will appear to be a true disciple of Christ; because he does not only observe the great law of charity, but from thence is led to keep all his other commandments. And what is it to be a disciple of Christ, but to learn from him, what we should believe and do, and to be guided by his doctrine and precepts in our judgment and conversation?

3. IT makes them like him, which is a further argument that they are really his disciples. Men are generally very much influenced by examples, and take after those, whom they sincerely respect as their masters, and friends. Nothing indeed is more agreeable to the character of a true disciple, than to imbibe the sentiments, and to follow the steps of his master. What then can more plainly evidence, that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ, than the practice of love? In this we shall resemble him, who was not only the brightest example of all other virtues; but more especially of the most pure and extensive charity, which ever appeared in the world. The very end of his coming  
into



into it was to do the greatest good to man-  
kind, by recovering them from ignorance to  
the knowledge of the truth; from the servi-  
tude of sin to the practice of holiness, and  
from the way of destruction to the path,  
which leads to eternal felicity. He conde-  
scended to live in a mean, afflicted state, that  
he might accomplish these great designs; and  
his whole life indeed was one continued act  
of the most perfect charity; for as St. Peter  
observes, *He went about doing good*, Acts x.  
38. He tenderly sympathized with the mi-  
series of mankind, and did not only possess  
the greatest abilities of doing good; but was  
always delighted in exerting them to relieve  
the necessitous and afflicted. His miracles  
were instances of the most diffusive good-  
ness, as well as of the greatest power; and  
were all of them calculated to attract the  
love of men by their beneficent influences,  
as well as to awaken their consideration by  
their stupendous effects. He fed the hun-  
gry, he healed the sick, he cured the lame  
and blind, that he might not only confirm  
the truth of his mission; but teach us like-  
wise to administer all the help we can to our  
fellow creatures in their distress. He was  
not only merciful and kind to those indigent  
persons, who implored his help; but did  
good to others likewise, who came in his  
way. He shewed compassion even to his  
implacable enemies, and prayed his Father  
to forgive them, when they were doing him  
the

SERM.

XVI.

S E R M. the greatest-injury. But to relate all the acts  
 XVI. of his charity, and to describe the various  
 methods, by which he did good to the souls  
 and the bodies of men, would be to transcribe the history of his life. Let us therefore chiefly fix our thoughts upon his inexpressible love to all of us, as sinners against God. He came to save us from those sins, by which we deserve the wrath of God; and patiently indured the most ignominious and painful death of the cross, that he might deliver us from our sins, and bring us to God. And now if we contemplate his life and death, the gracious ends of his living and dying; who does so nearly resemble him, so plainly appear to be one of his true disciples, as the man, who has divested himself of all uncharitableness, anger, and revenge, and is become liberal, meek, and forgiving? He is the Christian indeed, who learns of Christ to be compassionate and kind, and is not governed by the narrow principle of self love; but heartily desires and promotes the good of all men, as much as lies in his power. Who that knows the life of Jesus, can believe that man to be his disciple, who is unkind in his temper, and uncharitable in his practice? But if a man be like him in benevolence and mercy, in acts of liberality and forgiveness, this shews that he has been with Jesus indeed. *He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself*

himself also so to walk, even as he walked, SERM.

1 John ii. 6.

XVI.

4. IT will shew them to be his disciples indeed, as it is a manifest proof of their concern for his honor and interest. A true disciple will love his master, and shew a just regard to his reputation and authority. He therefore, who is a true disciple of Jesus Christ, will be possessed with a great concern for the advancement of his cause, and will endeavour to promote his religion by all proper methods. But nothing will more effectually prevail with men to entertain a good opinion of his religion, nor consequently more successfully promote it, than the love and concord of those, by whom it is professed. When others see what a mighty influence it has to restrain men from all unkindness and injustice, how powerfully it engages them to the practice of mutual charity; they will perceive and confess it to be worthy of God, who is infinitely good. This therefore will recommend the christian religion to all considerate persons, and advance the cause of Christ in the world. No interest can be successfully carried on without unity and concord in those, who are engaged in it; nor can any cause be so much weakened by any means, as by the discord of them, who are concerned to support it. It is a maxim of our blessed Lord, that, *If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand*; and on the other hand it

is



SERM. is allowed, that a small state may be strengthened and preserved by concord. A dying  
 XVI. man, says the fable, called his children together, and putting a bundle of twigs into their hands, bid them break it, which they could not do with all their strength. He then put into their hands a single twig, and bid them break that, which was very easily done. You see, said he, that if you live in unity and concord, you may prosper; but if you once suffer that good harmony to be broken, which should subsist between brethren, you will ruin your own interest, and become a prey to your enemies. Love and unity will make other societies prosper, as well as private families; but discord tends to break and destroy those, which are the most flourishing. Our blessed Lord therefore supposes, that the mutual love of his disciples would be one of the most effectual means to propagate and establish his religion in the world. He prayed the Father that they might be one, not only one in doctrine and testimony; but also animated by the same spirit, and firmly united in their affections to one another. John xvii. 21. *That they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee: that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* From which prayer it evidently appears, that the unity of his disciples was necessary to the propagation of his religion. If they had all preached the same doctrine,  
 and

and possessed the same power of working SERM.  
 miracles to confirm it; yet, if they were XVI.  
 disunited in their affections, and did not  
 maintain a perfect harmony among them-  
 selves, they could not have supported the  
 honor of their religion, nor propagated it  
 with so much success. Their dissensions  
 would have discredited and weakened their  
 cause. And if we consider the mean be-  
 gining of the gospel, we shall perceive how  
 much the success of it was owing to these  
 means. They who first adhered to our blef-  
 sed Lord were few in number, and despica-  
 ble in their circumstances. They were not  
 men famed for their parts and erudition,  
 nor such as were distinguished by places of  
 honor and power. Yet this little flock of  
 Christ, tho contemptible in the eye of men,  
 and opposed by the wise and mighty, grew  
 exceedingly, and in time extended itself  
 through all the known world. This won-  
 derful success was not only owing to the ex-  
 cellency of their doctrine, and power of  
 their miracles; but also to that sincere love  
 and firm concord, which united his disciples  
 together, as if they had been one body, ani-  
 mated by the same soul. They were indeed  
 the best patterns of sincere love the world  
 had ever seen. For when the circumstances  
 of the times required it, *The multitude of  
 them that believed, were of one heart, and of  
 one soul: neither said any of them, that ought  
 of the things which he possessed, was his own,  
 but*

SERM. *but they had all things common*, Acts iv. 32.

XVI. The mutual love of Christians was so remarkable, in the primitive times, that it was taken notice of, and confessed by their enemies themselves, and became a kind of proverb among them. See, they would say, how the Christians love each other.—And how ready they are to lay down their lives for one another, as Tertullian observes<sup>a</sup>. Minutius Felix, another apologist for the Christians, says, The love, which, to your sorrow, we express to one another, is, because we are perfect strangers to all hatred<sup>b</sup>. The apostate Julian, who set himself to oppose Christianity, yet could not but recommend their mutual love, to the imitation of heathens<sup>c</sup>. Had they loved one another as little as they were loved by the world; had the unjust reproaches cast upon them, or the meanness of their condition, alienated their affections from one another; the christian religion might have been stifled in its birth. But their sincere affection, which was for their own comfort, tended likewise to render their society amiable in the eyes of those, who were without, and invited them into their communion<sup>d</sup>. Hence therefore it was for the honor and interest of their common faith, as well as for their own peace and good, that the apostles so frequently, and so earnestly

<sup>a</sup> Apolog. c. 39. p. 31. Ed. Par. MDCLXXV. <sup>b</sup> P. 159. Ed. Davif. MDCCXII.  
<sup>c</sup> In fragment. p. 557. Ed. Petav. Par. MDCXXX.  
<sup>d</sup> See the fragment of Julian. p. 558. Ed. Pet.



earnestly exhort them to *keep the unity of the* S E R M.  
*spirit in the bond of peace,* and to *follow after* XVI.  
*the things, which make for peace.* Since then  
 those passions which are contrary to love,  
 and those contentions which arise from  
 thence, are dishonorable and hurtful to the  
 cause of religion; since the mutual love of  
 Christians is necessary to credit and recom-  
 mend their profession: it is plain, that they  
 alone are true disciples of Christ, who shun  
 those things, which would divide and destroy  
 his interest; and live in that love and good  
 agreement, which will advance his cause,  
 as well as secure their own comfort.

If therefore we love one another, as Christ  
 has loved us, this will prove that we are true  
 Christians; because it will shew, that we  
 sincerely believe in him, and have a just re-  
 gard to his authority; because it makes us  
 like him, and discovers a due concern for the  
 honor and support of his religion. I pro-  
 ceed to shew,

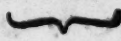
III. How we may judge of ourselves by  
 our love one to another, so as not to be de-  
 ceived.

AND first, we must consider, whether it  
 be connected with the other virtues of the  
 christian life, as it will be, if it is sincere.  
 We must not conclude, that the practice of  
 any particular virtues, tho ever so eminent,  
 will recommend us to the favor of God,  
 unless we observe all the other duties of the

SERM. christian life, which are equally required.

XVI. That love our blessed Lord commands in the text, will therefore shew us to be Christians indeed, because it is inseparably connected with those duties, which we owe to God, or more immediately concern ourselves. For as no man can truly love God, whom he has not seen, if he loves not his brother, whom he hath seen, as St. John observes, 1 Epist. iv. 20: so, if he loveth his brother, it is an argument that he loveth God; for, *If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us*, ver. 12. He, who truly loveth his brother, will also exercise forbearance, and be easily reconciled; which is a proof that he has mortified pride, anger and other sinful passions, and has contracted a humble, meek, and quiet spirit.

AGAIN, to judge safely of our state by the love we bear to other Christians, we must be certain also, that we sincerely practise every branch of this excellent virtue. For if we observe some instances of it, but wilfully neglect others; our love will be so manifestly defective, that it can be no evidence of our sincerity. For instance, tho a man give alms ever so liberally, his love is not genuine and sincere, if he will not be reconciled to offenders. And is not the charity of that man as certainly defective, as palpably insincere, who is kind only to Christians of his own complexion; but hates, reviles, and persecutes

persecutes those, who think differently from SERM.  
him in some points, tho they believe in Jesus XVI.  
Christ, and live in conformity to his laws?   
Oh! how destructive of this love, how disho-  
norable to the cause of Christ, are those per-  
secutions, which have so often raged among  
Christians? Their differences in judgment  
indeed, if they would stop here, would nei-  
ther be inconsistent with this virtue, nor dis-  
honorable to their holy profession. The ca-  
pacities and education of men are so diffe-  
rent, that it cannot reasonably be expected  
they should be of the same opinion in all  
things. Even the enemies of Christianity  
are not of the same mind in all respects, and  
cannot therefore justly blame Christians for  
following the light of their own consciences,  
tho they differ from one another. The  
things, which destroy this love, and give  
offence to unbelievers, are those fierce con-  
tentions, and cruel persecutions, which have  
prevailed in the christian world; and are in-  
deed the highest breach of that law, which  
Christ has given us for the practice of this vir-  
tue. To persecutors we may apply what Christ  
said to the sons of Zebedee, *Ye know not what  
manner of spirit ye are of*, Luke ix. 55.  
Nothing can be more contrary than all per-  
secution to that wisdom which is from a-  
bove, which is *first pure, then peaceable, gen-  
tle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and  
good fruits, without partiality and without  
hypocrisy*, James iii. 17. And tho unbe-



**SERM.** lievers cannot be justified, who do not judge  
**XVI.** by Christianity itself, as described in the writings of the apostles; but are prejudiced by the practice of modern Christians; yet, neither can those persons be excused, who lay a stumbling block in their way, by their unchristian temper and conduct. As Christians of the same denomination should maintain the honor of their profession by a sincere and fervent affection towards one another; so those, who are not of the same communion, should support the honor of their common Christianity, by the exercise of mutual forbearance and charity. But how can that love, which our blessed Lord commands, dwell in them, who perhaps give alms liberally to those, who are within the pale of their own church; but calumniate, plunder, imprison, and burn them, who cannot think as they do? Thus, if we would safely judge by our love to one another, that we are true disciples of Jesus Christ, and have consequently an interest in the favor of God; we must take care, that we practise every branch of this virtue, and that our love proceeds from such principles, as will lead us to observe all the other virtues of the christian life.

AND now, since mutual love is the characteristick of true Christians, let us take care to cultivate this excellent virtue. There are many things, which will destroy it, where it has not taken deep rooting in the heart.  
 May

May we therefore carefully avoid all those SERM. things, that our love may flourish and be XVI. conspicuous. Tho our sentiments are different in some things, which will not hinder the acceptance of our service with God, we should not cease to love one another, but manifest our love by a kind and mutual forbearance. For when St. Paul exhorts Christians to be of one accord, and of one mind, he does not exhort them to be of the same opinion in all respects, which is impossible; but to be one in concord, and to have the same reciprocal affection for one another, the same resolution to do nothing out of strife and vain glory, but with a sincere regard to the good of each other. Nor ought some failings in matters of practice to disunite our affections. We should consider, that we are all liable to various infirmities; and as we hope God will graciously accept us, notwithstanding our manifold imperfections, so we should not cease to love one another upon every failure in our conduct. Nay, the offences we have received from others should not disengage our affections from them, because true love is not soon provoked, but easily reconciled.

AND when any other Christians have so far departed from the true gospel of Christ, that we cannot hold communion with them, lest we should injure the truth, and countenance their innovations; yet let us not imagine, that we are not obliged to love them.

Tho

SERM. Tho we cannot in conscience manifest our  
XVI. love by living in communion with them, yet  
there are many other offices of this virtue,  
which we may and ought to exercise to-  
wards them. We must never behave in such  
a manner, as is inconsistent with christian  
charity. We must not designedly misrep-  
resent their opinions, nor defame their per-  
sons; we must not deprive them of their li-  
berty, nor inflict any evil upon them, be-  
cause we judge them to be erroneous. It  
has been too common, I confess, for Christ-  
ians to revile, oppress, and put to death  
those, who are not of their persuasion; but  
does this become the disciples of the meek  
and lowly Jesus? Is it justified by his exam-  
ple? Is it agreeable to his precepts? Is it ho-  
norable to his cause? No, if we would act  
like his disciples, we must judge charitably  
of them, who dissent from us; and give  
them that liberty of judging for themselves,  
which we claim as our own right. We  
must not shut our bowels of compassion a-  
gainst them, because they are not of our  
communion, but relieve them in their dis-  
tress. We may, by good arguments and a  
good behaviour, endeavour to convince them  
of their errors, and win them to the truth;  
but if we do not succede, we must not  
hate and persecute, but pity and bear with  
them.

LET us therefore fix upon our hearts a  
due sense of the obligations we are under to  
love



love one another. To this we are obliged SERM.  
by the love of God towards us, as has been XVI.  
observed already from St. John. We are  
likewise bound to do this by the solemn pro-  
fession we made at baptism, to live in obe-  
dience to Jesus Christ. Now this is the  
great law of Jesus Christ, That we love one  
another, as he has loved us. If therefore  
we do not practise this love in its full ex-  
tent, we act unworthy of our christian pro-  
fession, and violate the most sacred vows.  
We should consider ourselves as one spiritual  
body in Jesus Christ; and as all the parts of  
the natural body are serviceable to each  
other, and a tender sympathy runs through  
all of them, if any one is afflicted; so we  
should be united by mutual benevolence,  
and consult the good of one another. This  
argument is largely insisted upon by St. Paul  
in his first epistle to the Corinthians, ch. xii.  
By the holy communion we do not only de-  
clare, that we are of the same faith, but also  
profess our mutual love and unity. And  
tho other Christians are not of our persuasion,  
we should love them as believers in Jesus  
Christ and servants of God. Tho we do not  
think alike in some things, we are all regene-  
rated by the same spirit, and children of one  
father, even almighty God; we are servants  
of one Lord Jesus Christ, and heirs of the  
same glory; and should therefore love them  
for their relation to Christ, and for the ho-  
nor of his religion. May we therefore all  
of

p®  
earch  
ications

456 *Mutual love the distinguishing, &c.*

SERM. of us demonstrate ourselves to be true disci-  
XVI. ples of Christ, by fervent charity towards  
one another, and towards all Christians, that  
we may here adorn the doctrine of God our  
Saviour, and be well prepared for the realms  
of peace and glory above.



*THE END*

